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I  
inscribe this book  
with enduring affection and gratitude  
to the hundreds of Americans, cultured and  
simple, rich and poor, who by the generosity,  
warm-heartedness and sincerity they showed me  
made of my stay in their country  
the happiest time  
of my life.

“ . . . Men must endure  
Their going hence, even as their coming hither.  
Ripeness is all: come on.”

*King Lear.*

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## CHAPTER I

### OF MATTERS OUTSIDE AMERICA

#### § I

THE revolt came, suddenly and fiercely, one day in my house in the south of France. Such a blast of fury arose in me that it swept away my controls. I threw my pencil into one corner of my study, and a heap of crumpled manuscripts into the other. "God curse you!" I said to what I was doing. "I'm damned if I go on choking in you, you sewer!"

The sewer was Europe, and I was stifling in its mephitic emanations. I was engaged in writing a book called *I Explain the French*, a companion volume to *I Discover the English*, because my literary agent, my publishers, my English readers, my French friends and my Huguenot conscience had all told me, with insistence and vigour, that it was my duty as a good Liberal to Do my Bit in trying to bring together those equally, though differently, self-centred countries, England and France. My own opinion was that they were so obstinately incompatible in taste and outlook and mental habits that nothing but a common catastrophe would bring them reluctantly together—and too late, into the bargain, to be of any use to either of them or to the world at large. In the course of analysing the past and the present of France, and predicting a calamitous future if she didn't do what I prescribed, I had been obliged to survey all Europe. More, I believe, than any other continent, Europe has stunk to high heaven at every period of her history, but it seemed to me that she had reached a peak of stinking at the

time I refer to, which was the full tide of the implacable savage mass-terrorism of Stalin, the brutish obscene fanaticism of Hitler, the cynical ruffianism of Mussolini, the abject compromises and placations and duplicities of the great Democracies, the ignoble apostasies of the League of Nations, and the panic of the distracted small countries that, scandalously let down by the big ones, were pulled more and more irresistibly into the orbit of the dictatorships. "What do I see that is worth recording?" I cried. "All things to rack and shame the heart are here, and all in vain. This is Armageddon and the Apocalypse and Hell." My voice mounted to a shriek. "Philip!"

"Well, Missis Oh?" said Philip, supervening.

It would be entirely useless to indulge in hysterics in front of Philip, in spite of the relief offered by such manoeuvres. There is something in his aura which causes explosions to fizzle out. Philip is about forty-five, tall and sturdy, large bones well covered with muscles, a good plain serious somewhat inscrutable face, clean-shaven, in which you feel rather than perceive intelligence, integrity and resolution, thinning brown hair on an ample forehead, huge heart-shaped tortoiseshell glasses, modern design, before reflective, steady, and now-and-then humorous hazel eyes. He is a doctor of medicine and invariably dressed in plus fours — not the plus fours that are sported by East Europeans and South Americans on the French Riviera where I live, but, since they are plus fours, dreadful enough anyway. I do not know why Philip wears them, and I deplore his addiction to them, but I have never discussed them with him. Instinct warns one that personal questions put to Philip would peter out even more quickly than hysterics.

Philip materialized some years ago during a crisis of my own (I badly wanted to tell you all about it, and did so in my manuscript, but my publishers, frightened of the demented English laws on libel which don't even allow one to proclaim the truth, bullied me into taking it out), when

I was drowning in a bewilderment and an anguish of which nothing in my life, although it has been plentifully besprinkled with upheavals, disasters, failures, rivings, perils, political imprisonments and expulsions, physical suffering and mental despair, had given me the faintest foretaste. Philip materialized immediately, completely and immutably, took charge, kept me from a lunatic asylum, and has never abandoned me since. He is not what I would call a comfortable companion. He does not possess the adorable habit of patting one on the back and saying, "There . . . there . . ." He does not believe I am a model of *Verum, Pulchrum et Bonum*, those shining divinities that in my youth seized me by the hair and compelled me to assent to their essential and transcendent values, but of whom I have never even touched the glorious feet. He does not admit that the conduct of men and the nature of events can justify in the least the most microscopic of my own lapses. He is a merciless pricker of bubbles, self-pity, self-deceit, and of every sort of rationalization. He attributes all neuroses and most pain to vanity, and says that human unhappiness is mainly due to egomania. Not only can I never fool him, but never, in his presence, have I been able to fool myself. He is entirely sensible, unimaginative, unsentimental, uninfluenceable, an I-told-you-soer, an Always-righter, and often a prig. He exasperates me and thwarts me continually. He never mortifies or belittles or discourages me. He is the reallest thing in my existence; I could not endure without his intransigent but vivifying austerity, and it is to him alone that I owe the persistence of that difficult and fundamental sincerity which may ultimately lead me to my hitherto inaccessible goal of spiritual coherence and peace.

"Well?" repeated Philip.

"How, 'well'?" I asked heatedly. "What do you mean, 'well'? I am reviewing Europe. Where's 'well' to fit in, in that bloody mess?"

"That is for you to find out," said Philip blandly. "I am



not by *métier* a Social Observer, but you should live up to your intellectual pretensions."

"Well—darn the word!—there's not a single crevice into which I can squeeze it. I must go away."

"Why?"

"Philip, this is a bitter and corrosive landscape unfolding before me, filled with injustice, arrogance, hate, fear, lies, pain, blood, tears, greed and oppression. If ever it had gods, we have entombed them in sepulchres of excrements, and only evil-doers inhabit the high places. The leaders perpetrate infamy, the peoples love unkindness, and the nations eternally war. Now they pour destruction and death from the air as well as from the land and the sea, and on their own men and women and children as well as on their neighbours. Nothing can redeem their continuous crimes, except that soon they should all wipe each other off this earth they have defiled and disfigured— and ardently do I put my trust in such a consummation, for the Lord God has plainly grown too weary to stop the world and there is no other way to peace. In the meantime, however, I will not be a party to their wickedness, nor will I breathe their putrefaction.

"Besides, I am sick of Man. His circumstances alter - he used to crawl, and now he flies; he dwelt in caves and now he is massed in cities; he was a slave, bought and sold, and now he hires himself out by his own deed; he was a chattel of kings and despots and now he elects his rulers; he began as an ape and now by his tongue, his hand, his brain, he has created art and acquired science. But underneath it all, the horrible creature remains the same. He came he knows not whence and he goes he knows not whither; he is hungry, thirsty, afraid, deluded, tormented and an inflicter of torment; and his small and ugly Self, that burning tangle of passions and desires, is the origin of his consciousness and the aim of his endeavours. There is no constant in his societies, nor steadfast progress in his achievements; how

many times have they waxed and waned, how often have the mighty fallen from their seats and the humble been exalted, and how often have the weak become mighty and then been overthrown! How many times have there been crusades for peace and to settle humanity's future, and how many times has war been waged and humanity's future destroyed! How often have autocracies been replaced by democracies, and democracies succeeded by dictators; civilization delivered with great travail into the world, attacked and defended, and obliterated again! Neither in him nor in what he has invented are there permanent phenomena or enduring significance. He is an incurable bungler stuck on the top of a bloodthirsty devil; the most monstrous error of the Universe; and every created thing will burst into a psalm of thankfulness if, haply, he disappears."

"I gather from this passably grandiloquent discourse," said Philip, "that you are definitely fed up, but you do not cover all the facts sufficiently. I might contend that your indictment displays a certain ignorance of the history of Europe. She has had phases that were quite as bad as, if not worse than, her present condition. They changed and are past, so it is safe to assume that in some time Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini will also be names. Since policies are no more constant than societies, though to-day we wish to bash each other's head in, to-morrow we may walk hand in hand. For versatility cuts both ways, and you must remember that if yokes are fastened, they are equally apt to be smashed. As to man, it is evident that he cannot stay put, and that fixity is as impossible for him as for the waters under the moon—but because of this reason, none of his conjunctures, plights and vicissitudes is everlasting. Finally, you forget one thread of consistency that runs from age to age, from civilization to civilization and from generation to generation, and which man can forgo as little as he can forgo dying: the conception of Perfection. But it is obvious that you are in an emotional state, so it is no good arguing

with you. Where do you hope to discover a brighter picture?"

"In America."

"Just how have you figured that out?"

One of my grievances against Philip is that he has a precision of mind which is undistinguishable from sheer flat-footedness. It is not conducive to broad and subtle debate to be pulled up every minute to give chapter and verse for all one proclaims. I have told Philip so a million times, but he pays no attention. I did not wish at that particular moment to be pinned down to an enumeration of facts, for the truth was that I could not exactly be listed as an authority on America. I knew she had had a Revolution which transformed her from a British colony into an independent nation; a Civil War against her Southern States so as to preserve the Union; and, recently, in some inexplicable way, a Depression. I also knew that the Americans one met in Europe loudly declared that she was God's own Country, the Land of the Free, and a Hundred Per Cent Democracy, where the standards of living were incomparably higher than on our continent, the distribution of chances and opportunities infinitely more equitable, education incalculably more available, industry bigger, machines more perfected, locomotion more rapid, plumbing more sanitary, and general progress incessant. Great emphasis was laid, moreover, on the abundance of iced water and orange-juice, things which sounded cool and clean, but which I did not feel a would-be economist or sociologist was entitled to cite as very important phenomena. My belief that America would be a happier spectacle than Europe was in reality a somewhat wobbly mixture of inferences, deductions and intuitions rather than positive information, but if I disclosed that to Philip he would at once allude to wishful thinking, so I did not. Instead, I took refuge in reproach.

"Oh, Philip, how can you be so perverse! The Pilgrim Fathers, of course. . . . The Puritan Founders. The Ethic

of New England. The Virtues of the Pioneers. Everybody went at first to America to fight for his soul, or to release his soul, or to expand his soul, or to sanctify his soul. The very air must be impregnated with spirituality, holiness, fortitude, rectitude, nobility and heroism!"

"To judge," remarked Philip, "by some of the Americans who come over to Europe, I should not say that the air is invariably effective. However, let that pass. Am I to take it that the three-centuries-old radiations of the Puritan Founders, whose quality, when closely scrutinized, may perhaps turn out to be less dazzlingly righteous than you imagine, are your only reason for hoping to discover in America an ideal system?"

But by now I had assembled a few scattered memories which, if I reeled them off very quickly, might make a braver show.

"No, sir," I answered loftily. "As a responsible writer, my custom is to speak only what I can prove. The evidence I advance is the very story of America. She was born a Republic, and has not modified her composition. Her Constitution protects every individual, religion, and minority; men and women vote; and to the precept of government of the people by the people for the people she added, alone among the nations of this planet, the rider that the pursuit of happiness is one of the cardinal rights of her citizens. She has no king or dictator; no established social classes; and no invincible fetish-traditions. Her past is too short to be atavistic and overwhelming, and yet long enough to demonstrate that she was always informed by a selfsame egalitarian aspiration; her present is multifarious and vivid; and her future is stupendous. Her spaces are wider, her resources vaster, her energy newer, her spirit undefeated. She is not dependent upon international intelligence and international co-operation for her existence, so that if, as seems ineluctable, we tear each other to pieces in Europe, the mantle of Occidental civilization--save the mark!--will

fall upon her. The logical presumptions thus are that a Liberal Democracy, the only structure which ensures order without helotism, determination without tyranny, free initiative and private success without privilege, and a perpetual and voluntary self-correction, must be functioning indomitably and beneficially there."

I was pleased with the ring of my own words: it gave me confidence. But Philip behaved very irritatingly.

"Maybe," he said.

## § 2

Before I had quite made up my mind to go to America, Philip issued again. He pointed out that to assert I was nauseated by Europe was not a convincingly precise explanation of the European situation and atmosphere, nor would it serve eventually as a legitimate basis of comparison with the United States. The fact that Europe had a loathsome face was not the crux of the matter —every part of the world, he affirmed, sported a good many hideous features. The specific mask of Europe was being given to her by certain forces; it was they that were shaping her preponderantly; so unless I examined and assessed them I could not usefully contrast her with other regions. The necessary preliminary to any voyage, he said, was the study of the spirit, or the spirits, which were in ascendance in Europe, possessing and warping her in such a manner that she was in the main a horror to behold. I recognized the justness of Philip's argument and sat down, goose-fleshed with repulsion, to diagnose my god-forsaken continent's disease.

The civilization of Europe derives essentially from Greek thought. Throughout her history of unrelenting warfare, in spite of periods of fierce intolerance and persecution, of centuries of repressive domination by the Christian Church, and of prolonged intellectual eclipses, she never abolished

her heritage. After every convulsion, every tyranny, every set-back, she reverted to her mental origins, displaying in her breathing-spells the characteristics of a scientific spirit, the hallmark of that culture from which her own proceeded. After the Renaissance had fully achieved its effects and the Christian Church had lost its coercive power, these characteristics came to a head in the nineteenth century, and she established the most comprehensive body of positive sciences that mankind has known. Her civilization never meant the triumph of an ethic—nothing was more remote from the practice of any European country than steadfast adherence to an ethic, however formally and emphatically it was announced: indeed, from that angle, Europe always set the world a vicious example of hypocrisy—but it meant a superlative stress put on reason, knowledge, and tolerance. In other words, it meant the triumph of the *intellect*. In the nations which led Europe and represented the apogee of her distinctive civilization, the human intellect, before the Great War, had by and large definitely emerged from barbarism.

To-day, twenty years after the Great War, the picture Europe offers to the onlooker's gaze is that of a colossal upsurge of barbarism. Barbarism is the very texture of the national mentality of Russia and Germany; it is the major factor in the autocratic régimes operating in Italy, Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Roumania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece and Portugal; and it has invaded the Democracies in different degrees and guises—for although the bulk of the people in the big and small Democracies still champion Liberalism, totalitarian parties of one kind or another are entrenched in all, and the gale of savagery blowing over Europe has, if not utterly wrenched their beliefs from their hands, at least weakened their grip on principles. The apathy with which they accept every new manifestation of violence, cynicism and mendacity, and the attitude of craven conciliation they have adopted towards the dictators, are

proof enough that while they are not yet rotted to the core by the sickness, they have already been infected by its virus.

The twentieth-century barbarism of Europe consists in two myths, most inappropriately called "ideologies," for neither of them contains a grain of scientific or philosophical validity, and both break down under objective tests. They are Marxism and National-Socialism, working at full blast in Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany respectively. Let us investigate their contents.

The Marxist myth was evolved a hundred years ago by Karl Marx, a German socialist, son of a Christianized Jew. He was an irremediably vain and soured egotist, profoundly ignorant of historical science, with no conception whatever of the psychology of economic activities, who claimed all the certitude of a particularly fanatical prophet and all the privileges of a particularly irresponsible genius. He showed a sombre grandeur in his hatred of the poverty around him—he lived in England in her worst period of individualistic capitalism—and a vein of insanity in his hatred of the bourgeoisie, to whom he ascribed exclusively the guilt of that poverty. He reduced the most complex categories and abstractions to simple tangible entities, like a child's bogeys, all of a piece and subject to inflexible laws. He did not finish his principal work, one of the most unbelievably dismal, platitudinous and tedious books ever written, *Das Kapital*, and was so incompetent practically that he could not earn his living but had to be kept by a member of those middle classes which he so execrated. However, he discovered THE Truth about the past and the future, and our only possible way of salvation.

The central dogma of his myth is a process which he invented and which is termed Dialectical Materialism. This process is made to work (by him) in such a fashion through the ages that it brings "opposites" together in blood and flame and devastation and death—the Marxist inexorably insists on the greatest amount of each—and then, by the

fusion of these opposites, produces new unities which in their turn find their opposites. These opposites again coalesce, and again unities occur, which pounce upon other opposites, which weld themselves into other unities. And so forth and so on. Not only has the existence of the dialectic never been even remotely proved, but the opposites and the unities are never defined. In effect, they only represent what Marx, and his pupils after him, happen to dislike. We must leave it at that.

Now in the beginning, there was on earth an Age of Innocence, a Golden Age: Primitive Communism. Do I hear you asking how we know this? Marx says so--so of course it is a fact. Facts, let me tell you, are not to be discussed, especially Marx's Facts. But at some time or other, the dialectic suddenly got a move on, and started. What's that I hear again? Are you brazen enough to demand when and how it started? It started because Marx declares it started: just *started* - so there. (Perhaps it felt the need to take a little constitutional, having been boxed up so very long.) As it functioned, man's fate became appalling, and then more and more appalling: the dialectic, obviously animistic, dragged him through era after era of oppression, from the slavery of the ancient world, theocracy, feudalism, monarchy, to Capitalism, which is identical with supreme and all-embracing evil, and under which man endured the uttermost intolerable woes. In the capitalist world the Proletarian, a Noble Savage in whom resides all virtue, confronts his opposite the Bourgeois, a Degenerate Fiend in whom resides all sin. Clash after clash occurs, till there is a specially enormous clash, Universal Revolution, outvying every other clash in all the things the Marxist so dearly loves, blood, flame, devastation and death. It is a highly sacred revolution, not only because it is waged by the virtuous Proletarian--all the preceding revolutions, though they also aimed at political rights, freedom of conscience, equality for down-trodden minorities, are dismissed as



despicable muck, having been waged by the Bourgeoisie—but because in some inexplicable manner it leads to conquest over the forces of nature, which henceforth will be applied by man with “complete understanding.” *Complete*, if you please. . . . Without training, without study, without experience, the virtuous Proletarian, by virtue of his virtue, will reach at one jump not merely absolute justice, but absolute knowledge and wisdom as well.

At this stage the myth gets a bit muddle-headed. By the Marx-propounded rules of the dialectic, the Proletarian Revolution, however highly sacred, ought to result as usual in the amalgamation of the opposites and the fabrication of fresh unities. But no: the dialectic abruptly decides to stop. For heaven’s sake, don’t badger me for a reason; I only know what Marx tells me, and he says it just stops, exactly as it just started. So stop it does. And for good and all. (On reflection, I proffer two explanations for its stopping: it may have been fatigued, for Marx really drove it very hard; or it may have discerned that this time the revolution was made by the virtuous Proletarian. Why not? You will hear later on that Hitler says blood Thinks, so surely poor dear Marx can be permitted to say that the dialectic Sees?) Anyhow, it stops. Naturally, the opposites and the unities stop, too. To be quite frank with you, the whole cosmic machinery stops. The Noble Savage, the Proletarian, triumphs; the Degenerate Fiend, the Bourgeois, vanishes; Capitalism collapses, and Communism reigns.

There is a short interval, however, before it reigns totally. As the Bourgeois will presumably be so misguided as not to obey the dialectic immediately and vanish then and there, a Proletarian Dictatorship must be installed so as to “liquidate” him. As soon as he disappears irrevocably and only one class and one order are left, there is no necessity for any State. It “withers away.” Injustice, poverty, humiliation, oppression, crime, belong to the past. Equity, prosperity, happiness, liberty, sinlessness, are the present and the

unalterable future. The Age of Innocence, the Golden Age, is back. The cycle is completed. We have reached the Millennium, that lasts for ever and for ever, and History itself comes to an end. You see how inevitable, rational, scientific, and right it all is.

This incredible gibberish composes the Marxist myth. It was swallowed hook, line and sinker by Vladimir Lenin, a Russian revolutionist, and Marx's most famous disciple, a malignant monomaniac, a blood-curdling advocate of ruthlessness, with a shallow, unoriginal and static brain, an absolute incapacity for philosophical and scientific thought, an immense gift for strategy, an even vaster faculty for hatred and intolerance than his teacher, and an utter imperviousness to human suffering. He implanted the Marxist myth in Russia in 1917, at the cost of massacres and ruin for which, to find a precedent, we must call on Genghis Khan. He was succeeded by Joseph Stalin, a Georgian peasant, a man tyrannical by nature as well as by doctrine, of extremely narrow understanding, very silent, infinitely cunning, calculating and patient, past master in lies and conspiracies, unrelentingly vindictive, with as many nerves in his body as in a block of granite, who established a personal absolutism beside which the Czarist autocracy was relatively a mild affair. Still massacres, ruin, terrorism, were all according to plan. The Marxist myth had laid down that they were the indispensable accompaniment to Enlightened Liberation. The only thing that mattered was that at last Communism had been rooted in a country—a big country, one-sixth of the surface of the globe. Consequently the Millennium was at hand.

But now something went very wrong indeed with the myth. Perhaps Marx had choked off the dialectic prematurely; or Lenin had made a slight mistake about the date of the "final and decisive battle"; or the cosmic machinery objected to being scrapped; or, more simply, the time had come, since hoaxes cannot continue perpetually, for realities

to show up the Marxist hoax. The Marxist interpretation of history was subjective and sectarian, but provided legends about the past are vivid, simplistic, and make an appeal to the instincts of men rendered resentful by suffering and frustration, it is child's play to foist them as verities on the masses. The peril lies in anticipations, for when predictions are given the lie by events occurring under one's eyes, even the most ignorant of masses can perceive the discrepancy between prophecy and reality. The present realities flout Marx most indecently. If you remember, he had decreed that the Proletarian Revolution would be followed by the Golden Age, that is, equity, prosperity, happiness, liberty, sinlessness and statelessness. Come, then: we shall contemplate Russia, where the Proletarian Revolution did take place and where all the characteristics of the Golden Age ought to be flourishing sublimely.

Looking at it, your first thought will be that you must be labouring under a hallucination, and you will pinch yourself so as to awake. But pinch away as you will - even to the point of pinching the flesh off your bones, as I did - you will not change the spectacle. Far from exhibiting the characteristics of the Golden Age, equity, prosperity, happiness, liberty, sinlessness and statelessness, Communist Russia nakedly shows itself to-day as a land ruled by one all-mighty despot, by a secret police, and by a huge bureaucracy that cringes to the omnipotent tyrant, bullies the people, and is becoming more and more obviously bourgeois in its habits, aspirations, competition, and love of individual property. Politically, there is an undisputed oligarchy; economically, more misery than in the most miserable Balkan State; socially, a multitude of classes, with hair-raising inequalities in wages; industrially, a "speeding-up" method that could give points and a beating to the vilest form of capitalistic factory-drudgery. The State has done nothing like "wither away"; it is unassailably powerful and coercive—so much so that it kills, not only those who do not agree with it, but

those who at any time *might* not agree with it. As for sin in this Proletarian heaven, it is more rampant than in the Czarist hell, a quite immeasurable wickedness being indicated by the thousands of arrests, imprisonments, exiles and executions that go on every day.

What is still more disconcerting is that the Marxists themselves have become sinful, and the most sinful of all are the group of the very first revolutionists, Lenin's personal friends and henchmen. For insisting that Marxism should materialize in a Marxist country, they are dubbed traitors and lepers and reptiles and vipers, and shot down in crowds. Infinitely more than in Czarist Russia, justice, in Soviet Russia, has turned into a function of government. Guilt is thrust upon the accused; no lawyers dare defend them boldly; and long before trials begin the mobs, saturated with State propaganda, demand the death penalty irrespective of any evidence. In a community that was to have been as international as it was classless, a militant and imperialistic nationalism, every whit as blatant as Fascism, is intensively cultivated. Shockingly improper as are all these refusals on the part of the present to conform to the myth, there is yet worse to be noted. Marx had very carefully arranged that Capitalism should lose its head and precipitate its doom, hurling itself into the abyss like the Gadarene swine. But what most reprehensibly happened was that Communism, not Capitalism, was annihilated as a system of government in every single nation where it had obtained a foothold outside Russia, and the Degenerate Bourgeois, instead of vanishing before the Noble Proletarian, hit out and made a revolution of his own in a country much more formidable than Russia—stealing unscrupulously, in the bargain, the Noble Proletarian's cherished methods of lies, vituperation, slander, amorality, incitement to violence, joy over brutal deeds, pitiless persecution—such a terrible revolution, so incomparably more resourceful, capable and coherent than Communism, that it drove the latter, through sheer ignominious panic, to

exorbitantly humble concessions, supporting infamous conservative monarchical régimes, making military, political and economic pacts with abominable capitalistic democracies, rallying to the imperialistic League of Nations, tolerating religion, the "opium of the people," and arming for all it is worth. What price the Millennium now?

Well, enough of this first sinister farce, the Marxist myth, which exacted from the Russian people more blood and pain than all their Czars and wars rolled together. The second myth poisoning Europe is that of National-Socialism or Nazism, as colossal a quackery biologically as Marxism is economically and philosophically. Here we have as central dogma the Principle of Race, elaborated by Adolf Hitler, the most prodigious demagogue the world has known. He decided that in his country there is an Aryan race, the Germans, which is the Elect, the Immaculate, the Glorious. It is sacred, apart, and incommensurably superior to all the other races of the planet; the repository of all virtue; in fact, virtue itself. This holiness is due not to specific achievements or to acquired merits, but to its very nature, the substance of its organic composition, the fabric of its cells. From the beginning—all the myths carry us back to the sources of the Cosmos—it was destined to transcendence by reason of the mould in which it was fashioned. The Aryan and German texture of its flesh and blood pre-ordained it to supremacy. So spoke Adolf Hitler—and there you are. What can you do against a God or Fate-decreed supremacy? Merely weep burning tears that you are not of the Elect, the Immaculate, the Glorious. But even if you weep your eyes out, it won't avail you, for you can only be born, by a special choice of Teutonic Providence, into the Elect, the Immaculate, the Glorious. You can't ever, *ever* creep in if you are not a German.

Now the word "Aryan" is a philological term. It refers to a family of closely allied languages spoken by a large number of different peoples, nations, and stocks. An Aryan,

therefore, means one who belongs to a people, or a nation, or a stock speaking an Aryan language, and includes Indians, Persians, Slavs, Latins, Celts, quite as much as Germans. Furthermore, the Germans are no purer as a race than any other; if anything, they are more mongrel than many others, for the modern German nation is ethnologically the residue, after tens of centuries of incalculable mixings, adulterations and bastardizations, of hundreds and hundreds of tribes of Celtic, Slavonic, Scandinavian and Hunnish origin. However, the National-Socialists meet that tiny scientific difficulty—and the strange contradiction opposed to their legend of superlative virile blondness by the physical appearance of Hitler, Goebbels and scores of prominent Nazis—by declaring that in the last resort the question is one of mysticism only a German can understand, which indeed is so, and that the German Blood alone is able to recognize the German Race. (You see, Blood *thinks*. If you were not aware of this, it can only be because you are a non-Aryan yourself.) With this peremptory assurance, that the corpuscles discern and analyse ethnical blends all by their perspicacious selves, the Nazis have clinched the affair. By the way, I must not omit to inform you that Soil as well as Blood gives unity and vitality to the German people. So a cult of Nature has broken out, especially the Nature of forests and mountains, and is sustained by half macabre, half grotesque rites dedicated to the “days of long ago that have no beginning.” (I do not know what that means, but the Germans penetrate into the enigmatic heart of things, deep, deep, more deeply than I.) When I travelled in the high Caucasus, I came upon tribes that worshipped hard rocks and dark rivers and eerie trees; in Nazi Germany I listened to lectures instructing adolescents in the religion of Diana Abnoba, the goddess of the Black Forest, and the mysticism of megalithic remains. Of the two, the German brand of paganism was the more bathetic.

After the dogma of Race comes the dogma of Nationhood.

According to Hitler, what constitutes a nation is exclusively Blood and Race. All the men and women, therefore, who belong to the Aryan and German race compose, because of their identical blood, one same nation. Before Hitler started to teach THE Truth—as Marx did, only THE Truth has now changed—it was held that similarity of blood was the characteristic, not of a nation, but of the tribe; but since Hitler says that a racial homogeneous blood-brotherhood alone makes a nation, Germany, which used to be a country universally admired for its scientific integrity, says so, too. And that's that. Now what do we perceive with regard to the German blood-brotherhood, that is, the German nation? We perceive that iniquitous and accused enemies have erected frontiers separating the members of the German blood-brotherhood from one another, that is, dividing the German nation. This is an unnatural and monstrous outrage, for the German nation must absolutely live on the same soil, in complete sovereignty and impeccable unity, under one system and one leader, preserving and developing in common its superhuman qualities. Therefore the unnatural frontiers must be abolished, and, incidentally, the iniquitous enemies punished. The Germans in Austria, in Czechoslovakia, in Italy, in Danzig, in Memel, in Poland, in Russia, must be assembled in and on the "Greater Germany," thus justly producing the apotheosis of the German blood, the German race, and the German nation.

The third dogma of the Nazi myth relates to the function of the State. The State is the *Volk*, the community as a whole. It is an absolute, in comparison with which all persons and groups are "relative," to be conceived of only in connection with the State. But since the State is an absolute, the only possible connection between persons and groups on one side and the State on the other, is that they should serve the State—so the annoying question of individual rights and of freedom is disposed of, there being in the last analysis no individuals, only the community or State, and no free-

dom, save to work and die for the *Volk* or State. Now by divine dispensation, the German State has been put under the complete control of the National-Socialist Party, and within this party Hitler, again by a special intervention of the Lord, was designated as the mouthpiece of the *Volk* and inspired by Him to reveal to the nation the road to, and the practice of, redemption. Hitler must therefore be accorded utter, blind, and devoted obedience, as he is the *Volk*, and the *Volk* is the State, and the State is the National-Socialist Party, and behind the National-Socialist Party is God. I know it sounds a little confusing, but in reality it is simplicity itself: you do exactly what the State tells you, or the Gestapo gets hold of you and you rot in a concentration camp or your head is cut off.

These doctrines were set forth in a book, *Mein Kampf*, to-day officially accepted by the Germans and carrying in their eyes the same imperious authority as the Bible in the eyes of the Fundamentalists. Its author was Hitler, an Austrian house-painter, soft, flabby, and effeminate-looking, a paranoiac, neurotic and romantic to the bone, with the one-track brain of a *primaire* (a mental primitive), an elementary-school education, an intoxicated imagination, the flaming passion, conviction and simplicity of a fanatical dreamer—possessing, too, the dreamer's power to transport himself as well as his audience into his own world—brutal and bloody-minded, mediumistically intuitive, invincibly crafty, an unsurpassable liar, a stage-manager of the first magnitude, and a screecher and vociferator such as had never been heard before. He became the dictator of the Third Reich in 1933, and bawling, thundering, raving, smashing, lashing out, beating his fists, bursting into hysterical sobs, he proceeded to apply the methods he had indicated in his book and which were to lead the German people back to their pristine splendour. The first and most immediate method was Race Purification. You will hardly credit your ears, but it appeared that the Elect, the Immaculate and



the Glorious had lapsed from "grace and gone a-fornicating and a-whoring, polluting their quasi-divine Aryan blood—so retributive misfortune had overtaken them. One of their chastisements was that "Satanic Powers" had "stabbed them in the back" in the Great War: that's why they lost it. Hitler's moves were made with "sommambulistic certainty," in direct communication with the Will of God, which is the Racial Principle in action. By the most efficient revolution in modern times; by concentration camps, purges and executions; by the wholesale suppression of political and ideological antagonists; by the persecution of the Catholic and Protestant Churches, that up till now have refused to enthrone the secular religion of Blood and Soil, Race and Nationhood above the Christian creed; by the extirpation of the Jews, the race-defilers *par excellence*, the incarnation of all the malice and evil in the world, physically sickening, maggots imbedded in every piece of ordure and infamy, the living illustration of original sin (like the Bourgeois in the Marxist myth), and by depriving even part-Semites of the German name and citizenship, he has already cleared the Aryan and German race of blood-contamination, alien decadent ideas and corruptive objectives. Every jot and particle of foreign organic and intellectual filth being drastically eliminated, and the de-Christianization of the young being well advanced, the race is almost chock-full again of Electness, Immaculateness and Glory.

Nationhood, unfortunately, has not progressed quite so quickly. But a good beginning was made in 1938, when Austria was forcibly absorbed; the Sudeten Germans in Czechoslovakia, with the precipitate connivance of the great Democracies unmanned by the Nazi threat of war, were clasped, good lands and rich resources included, to Hitler's bosom; and unremitting agitation for reunion to Germany is kept up in Danzig and Memel. At the moment it is impossible to deny that Hitler's principal dogmas, actuated by true German discipline and docility, are panning out

better than the dialectic, whose Jewish and Slav emotionalism always rendered it unreliable and finally caused it to go on a little strike from which Marxism has never recovered.

Race Purification nearly accomplished, Nationhood on the march - is that the summum of the Nazi vision? Not on your life! There must be much more to express and realize perfectly the resplendence and transcendence of the Germans. There must be a return to the way of the old Aryan and Teuton gods, who have been resuscitated for that express purpose, to that of the old Aryan and Teuton tribes, to that of the old Aryan and Teuton soul: Battle. Not battle merely to protect or swallow something, but battle for the sake of battle, to kill and to be killed, because battle is the stimulus, the breath and the seal of the genuine Germanic spirit. By the "heroic worship" and the "heroic consummation" of combat only, can the Germanic spirit come fully into its own again--and unless the Germanic spirit denies its essence and its goal and thus ceases to be Germanic, it must perform that for which it was, from the creation of the universe, mysteriously and fatally made. It is its duty to the deities, to itself, and to mankind. I am afraid that renegades such as you and I will not properly appreciate this duty, but luckily the Germans are made of nobler moral stuff than we. Their mission demands that they should be masters not only of their own realm but of inferior races and strains, so they shall subjugate by war, and exploit, all the nations which hinder or threaten their rightful domination. You'd never imagine how many do. There's the rest of Czechoslovakia to be demolished. There's Hungary and Roumania and Yugoslavia--to be reduced to vassalage; and Poland, to be occupied and become a dependency. There's Russia to be dismembered, and her richest European territories to be colonized. There's France, the permanent arch-foe, to be crushed. There's the Pax Britannica to be blown sky-high. Then after German hegemony has been installed in Europe, there's the East, isn't there, and by Woden and the Norns!

there's the whole earth to be annexed and the top of the world to sit on. If you follow the National-Socialist myth step by step, you'll find that that's its ultimate culmination: the Top of the World for the Germans to sit on, for ever and for ever, alone. Now then—what's the matter with *that* Millennium?<sup>1</sup>

Here I open a gigantic parenthesis.

It really ought to be a Note, but if I do make it a Note, readers might be tempted to skip it, a culpable proceeding which would vex me. It will be noticed that I have not included Italian Fascism among the European myths. I have not done so for the following reasons:

1. Italian Fascism started internally as an autocracy directed against Parliamentarism, Liberalism, Socialism and Communism with, externally, imperialistic and expansionist aims of a definite, realistic and *terre à terre* character, an aggressive bombastic national vanity and an inordinate amount of political ill-faith. From the first it approximated to a disgraceful and dangerous retrogression in European civilization, but it was not the unspeakable headlong plunge into stark barbarism which Marxism and National-Socialism represent, for it did not possess the mortal attributes of the myth, *which are religious*. Fascism did not begin as a religion. Italy already had a religion, Roman Catholicism, and there were then no signs at all that Catholicism, which is inseparable from the Italian temperament and culture, could be ousted and replaced among the masses by a secular religion of Benito Mussolini's concocting. Mussolini recognized this

<sup>1</sup> I do not know of a more balanced, profound and absorbing analysis of the essence of Marxism and National-Socialism than Mr. F. A. Voigt's *Unto Caesar*. One is almost awed by the vigour of the author's intellect and the extent of his understanding (he is editor for foreign affairs of that great Liberal newspaper, the *Manchester Guardian*), and his study of the two contemporary secular religions, so similar, despite their ostensible rivalry, in precept and in practice, is the most illuminating and formidable indictment of their spirit of hating arrogance, class and racial, that it is possible to read. The book is *not* easy reading, but if the effort is made, the result cannot but be a real and permanent comprehension of the whole madness of Europe in our time. I wish to thank Mr. Voigt here for the inestimable help his work gave me.

so lucidly that he based his régime on a very firm alliance with the Vatican, which was accorded all the rights and privileges it demanded and in return gave its blessing to the Duce.

2. Mussolini himself did not assume the rôle and properties of a specifically God-sent envoy, as Hitler did, for instance, with his direct and private line to heaven. Mussolini is neither a revolutionary, nor a doctrinaire and sectarian like the other dictators. He is a political condottiere, an unexcelled opportunist, a redoubtably clever and cynical diplomatist, a boasting and whooping megalomaniac obsessed with Cæsarism and Ancient Rome, who sheds his principles like old shoes when they are no longer convenient to his ambitious game—basically an unbeliever, capable of very sudden and radical transformations. His most unvarying trait is a liking for violence, extremism, and a gross arrogant truculence, which he combines with exceptional histrionic and oratorical gifts and a common, massive, dominating masculinity. He was never adored with the morbid mysticism the mummified corpse of Lenin and the living persons of Stalin and Hitler evoke in Russia and Germany, for the Italians, like all Latins, are fundamentally a rational, not a mystical people. They are enormously excited by Mussolini, kept in a hectic state of patriotic tension and in some ways invigorated by him; they are extravagantly proud of him and enthusiastic about him, but they do not worship him.

3. Italian Fascism was only imperfectly totalitarian. From the point of view of repression and cruelty its record is not in the same class as the Russian and German records. It drastically suppressed political and civic liberties, imprisoned thousands of individuals and murdered scores. But the Russian Communist Party exterminated whole classes—bourgeois, aristocrats, nepmen and koulaks—and is responsible, what with its Revolution proper, its "liquidations," its mass-executions and the famines brought about in 1921

and 1932 by Marxist politics and economics and deliberately maintained by the Soviet government, for the death of anything from twenty to twenty-five million people. From what I myself saw and learnt in Soviet Russia during my long stay there, I should say that these figures are conservative. As for the National-Socialist Party, it butchered in its purge of June 1934 alone, from six to seven thousand human beings; it has tortured and mutilated hundreds of thousands in its concentration camps, and has condemned a defenceless minority of five hundred thousand German Jews to ruin and isolation. Again, though in Italy there are exceedingly severe reprisals against avowed adversaries, there is not a Terror, while in Germany there is a brutishly physical Terror, and in Russia a refined sadistic Terror no normal person can even begin to understand. I have been in both countries and my unfaltering conviction is that, beside the Russian Communists, the Nazis, for all their ferocity, are simple amateurs in terrorism. Lastly, the Italians have not been as entirely depraved as the Russians and Germans. Italian culture and sensibility have not been vitiated to the same extent. The people are highly intelligent and so they retain a certain independence of thought, if not of action. They've swallowed a lot, castor-oil included: granted. But they are intellectually much more sales-resistant than Slavs and Teutons, and when I went to Italy, on each of my visits I found circles where I could discuss politics, economics, science and letters from the Liberal standpoint—circles and discussions which would be utterly inconceivable under the two other dictatorships—though I am bound to add that the anti-Fascist criticisms I heard were voiced by the educated bourgeoisie and the peasants, and not by the rising generation.

4. Fascism has done absolutely nothing new from the angle of either political doctrine or economics. The system, a Party entirely governing a nation, is a spectacle Europe has witnessed hundreds of times during the last three cen-

tures, and as for the Fascist Corporative State, it is unmitigated humbug. Laws were indeed passed establishing an intricate network of corporations for the various industries, but they remained on paper, and up to date the only corporation in corporative Italy that appears to be functioning corporatively is in the theatrical trade. What Mussolini has done, however, most successfully, is to extol the "force of bayonets," stoke up bellicosity, rouse in the population a pathological but pugnacious appetite for prestige, militarize the children, whose imagination he has captured, spend immense sums which unbalanced the budget and impoverished all the classes irreparably, on navy, army, and air forces and on the sterile conquest of Abyssinia, and never lose a chance to complicate the international situation, so that Italy should bag a larger share of world-consideration and a bigger place in the sun.

Primarily, therefore, Italian Fascism was in its essence not a secular religion but an anachronism, a hideous and perilous throwback, showing in its home government, its national dispositions, its goal and its tactics the vices all the European countries have exhibited at one stage or another of their existence, but which the advanced Democracies had begun seriously to discard in the twentieth century. At the moment of writing, it is still not a secular religion, and so I still cannot list it among the myths. True, since the Fascist Party entered into an official pact with the National-Socialists in 1936, there are numerous indications that Fascism is changing, and going from very bad to incomparably worse. The Racial Principle is making gigantic strides in Italy, State propaganda is intensely busy on the subject, and political and economic persecution of the Jews has been decreed and is put into effect. The young, trained in State schools and Fascistic organizations, are tending to glorify Mussolini at the very least as a demi-god. But the Catholic Church showed at long last some consciousness of its duty, and made a series of counter moves in Papal letters and

proclamations. It denounced the dangers of nationalism and anti-Semitism, and explicitly stated that both are incompatible with the Catholic teaching and the Catholic mentality. No doubt at all that the Fascist Party will go on with its propaganda, but if the Church, too, continues to make a stand, it does not seem to me over likely that Fascism will impose either racism or Mussolini's divine mission as *dogmas* on the nation and risk a quite unhealable split with a religion which has, as yet, an organic hold on the people. The Church, to its permanent shame, supported Fascism, but with a certain wisdom in its dishonour, only as long as it consented to render unto Cæsar the things that were Cæsar's and to the Church the things that were the Church's. If Fascism transforms itself into a spiritual issue, as Marxism and National-Socialism have, refuses to recognize and respect the distinction between the State and God, and intransigently becomes a myth, no one can foretell how it will fare. For the Church itself possesses a tremendous history and experience of totalitarianism, and in spite of all the black sins of which it bears the mark on its aged face, as a phenomenon of human organization it has no rival. Besides, it is backed by Eternity, which is more than anyone can say of Marxism, National-Socialism and Fascism alike.

Here I close my gigantic parenthesis.

It is utterly false to think that the Marxist and National-Socialist myths, which fill the world with their mutual accusations, abuse and curses, so loudly and volubly that for some time harrowed Europe sincerely believed they were dissimilar, are informed with a different spirit. *They are two aspects of the same bestial visage.* Both engender personal hatred; it is of no importance that one should hate the Bourgeois and the Nazi, and the other the Communist and the Jew; what is important is that they breed and propagate a hatred of their opponents so fierce, so malignaut, so vengeful, so murderous that only annihilation of these opponents can satisfy it. On a scale hitherto unknown, both - though

Communism was the first to spread the pestilential methods National-Socialism has since adopted have poured on Europe avalanches of fury, fanaticism, intolerance, cynicism, false standards, systematically lying propaganda, distorted history, the crassest superstitions, a diabolical derision of honour, mercy, generosity, and any manifestation of magnanimity. In the Spanish Civil War we see already the results of their teachings—a cruelty and ruthlessness beside which the fighting nations of 1914 were imaginative and humane—as well as a terrible rehearsal for the Holy War of the future, the War of the Myths. (Not the least symptom of the degradation they have provoked is the romantic glorification of the Spanish struggle and the partisan enthusiasm it awakened: in the descriptions of European and American writers alike there is a sort of brutal enjoyment of the monstrous scenes which were witnessed.) Both preach that the objective they have in view again, it does not matter whether that objective is the exaltation of a class, the Proletariat, or of a race, the German—can only be attained by catastrophe: not only are they totally indifferent to human pain, but they revel in the contemplation of the assassinations, the upheavals, the havoc that are needed to bring about their objective. The writings of Marx, Lenin and Hitler overflow with these sanguinary and obscene visions. Both order mankind to pay the most atrocious price ever imagined for the victory of that portion of mankind to which they belong. Both live in hopes of, and work for, crises which will shatter the restraints imposed by the European consciousness, by law, thought, morality and custom, so that violence should reach a maximum of intensity and breadth. And their menace to the world at large is identical: an apocalyptic rupture with all the past, with all history, with all human society as men have known it up to now—and Force trampling the earth. That is what Barbarism has always signified, and always accomplished when it was successful.



So much for what the myths, those coils of wild serpents hissing and striking in every direction, materially wish on us. Psychologically, what is the type of mind they have developed—a better word would be revived—wherever they exert their influence? It is self-evident, too self-evident to require any elaboration, that under their regimentation thought is completely shackled and emotion completely constrained, both functioning only at the word of command and only along the lines laid down by authority; that there is no free and spontaneous growth; and that education, science, the arts, literature, the film, the wireless, speech, all news, are compelled to serve the myth, the single master. In Russia and in Germany the human mind has become merely the echo of the myth which rules the country. But Communism and National-Socialism have done far more, far worse, than extinguish intellectual richness and variety—far more, far worse even than obliterate what is perhaps the crowning merit of civilization: the idea that truth has an intrinsic value, an intrinsic right, regardless of personal opinions and passions. What they have done is to intensify and exalt instinct. By the common consent of thinking humanity, progress has always been taken to mean the struggle to escape from instinct, and the fundamental difference between the mind of rational and of brutish man consists precisely in the degree of control established over instinct. The myths have unleashed it. Their appeal is made to generalized primitive impulses and to the co-operation of primitive feelings: fear and execration of everything outside the herd, whether it be the class or the race, pain and extermination for the enemies of the herd, hunting of the scapegoats on whom are heaped the misfortunes of the herd, glorification of the virtues and beauties of the herd, worship of the god, king, or chief of the herd. This is properly the mind of the savage, who is also inflamed by delusions, obsessed by the blood-lust, shut off from free horizons and investigation, immured in idolatry and fixed for life in an

immutable pattern. In the twentieth century after Christ, at one backward bound, the myths have caused millions of men to return to the mental world in which we were imprisoned in our jungles two or three hundred thousand years ago.

Finally, what sort of society are the myths building up? By their organization, the collectivity has become all and counts for everything, the individual counts for nothing and is sacrificed. But the community is embodied in one man; his will replaces law, his beliefs reason, his objectives knowledge, his sentiments philosophy, his imperatives conscience, and his creatures stand for authority. All the devices of tyranny are employed to suppress resistance, and of uncritical propaganda to secure emotional support. Beaten or hypnotized by the machinery of power and the endless repetition of formulae and incantations into mass-living, mass-thinking, mass-acting, the people are like pulp pressed into an iron mould. On every point, in every domain, material, psychological and social, the myths incarnate the oldest state of affairs known to historians and anthropologists: hate, alarm, slaughter, charlatanism, superstition, the totem, the fetish, the taboo, the tribal war-song, unquestioning acceptance of the magic of the leader and the edicts of the priests: Barbarism reconstituted in its ancient entirety. This hot thick darkness, this implacable evil, this deadly reversion to the beast from which humanity so slowly and agonizedly evolved, have been let loose on Europe. The mentality of the ancestral primate is superseding that of civilized man. And in saying this, the chances are that I am calumniating the ancestral primate, for to-day some scientists incline to think that our line of ascent runs from gibbonoid types, small, sensitive, curious, and affectionate creatures. Thanks to the myths a deviation has occurred, for what we resemble now are degenerate gorillas.

"Well," said Philip at this juncture, "it seems to me that here at last, in the theory of the scientists, you have a

reasonable motive for optimism. In your own interest, I could not encourage you to travel over three thousand miles of ocean if what you expected to find on the other side was a full-fledged Utopia. But it is not too much to hope that you may discover in the American people the lovable traits of the tree-shrew instead of, as in the European nations, the abhorrent characteristics of the ape. If you did, why then you could prescribe, according to the intellectual fashion of our time, a Millennium of your own, where men will live for ever and for ever in conditions of arboreal innocence, happiness and wisdom, and which they would achieve by the simple and idyllic process of climbing trees and dwelling in them again. Oh, felicitous solution of the fevered problem of mankind's future! If such is your refreshing quest, and such your uplifting design—by all means, Missis Oh, go to America.”

My private opinion is that Philip's wit tends to be more than a trifle on the heavy side, but it was not the moment to antagonize him by undiluted candour. I took him at his word and removed myself and him as speedily as possible from Europe.<sup>1</sup>

### § 3

The first stage of my journey brought me to London, where it was proved to me for the hundred thousandth time

<sup>1</sup> I did not mean to disclose who Philip is. My publishers have forced me to, as they say it is not fair to my readers to conceal his identity. I do wish my publishers would let me alone: they offer so many bright and continual suggestions—all contrary to my own conceptions—that I often wonder why they do not write my book instead of me. Well, Philip is the mixture of the two most fundamental and invincible elements of my brain: my Latin reality of spirit and my Huguenot conscience. He happened just as I explained, at a time when nobody and nothing being able to help me, my instinct of self-preservation caused me to throw out a control so as to defend my sanity. It was such a powerful control, and so indefatigably sustained, that it developed a distinct existence of its own, and now I never remember or feel that Philip is not a person. Since to keep my balance it was necessary for me to resort to some form of compensation, I am grateful indeed that my ancestors and my early education shaped Philip as an extremely astringent monitor.

that neither intelligence, nor will, nor the scaring knowledge of having been had, can prevail against the dogmas instilled into a child's brain during its plastic years. I succumbed to my life-long persuasion that what the English say must be true. This pernicious belief was sown and cultivated in me by English governesses and professors in my nursery and school days, and though in my peregrinations throughout the world I have come to realize that British governments, administrators, high commissioners, military police, intelligence agents, lawyers, juries, publishers (not my present ones) and lovers are capable of a perfidy and a callousness compared with which our Latin lies are straight and harmless, all my mature experience is as if it was not. *A priori* every Englishman is a gentleman, and gentlemen always tell the truth. The consequence is that I am quite helpless when dealing with English rascals, of whom there are a great many.

On this occasion I let myself be bamboozled by English shipping clerks. They assured me that tourist class on one of their lines and one of their oldest tubs was the acme of delight. Now I get immeasurably sick on a boat whenever it just leans over, and even if it stays upright, I am so illimitably bored by all that dreary silly purposeless wet water round me, and so sharply irritated by barging into people everywhere, that I keep to my bed. So either way it is exceedingly important to me that my cabin should be decent. A cabin in tourist class, said the clerks, was so spacious, I'd be lost in it. Should I be alone, I asked—another essential consideration. Most certainly I'd be alone: trust an Englishman to understand the need for privacy; they'd never dream of allowing anyone to violate my delicious retreat. Since it was an Englishman who was promising me miracles, it did not enter my head to doubt them, and I booked my berth.

What I was ushered into when I joined the vessel was a cupboard. And an inner one at that. No port-hole. Two

berths so closely fixed one above the other that you could sit up in neither. So little floor-room that two persons could not stand in the cabin at the same time. No wardrobe: three or four hooks on the walls. And there was a second passenger in that funeral urn! I vociferously demanded explanations and removals, but there was no explanation to be obtained save that the English had fooled me again, and no removal worth while since the rest of the tourist accommodation was as exiguous, insanitary, and generally execrable as mine. I had to pass into first class, at what my thrifty soul considered an extortionate price, and even then the contraption they gave me was an inside cabin where the air came through ventilators and the light through electric lamps. I maintain that nothing is more abnormal than to get air and light by artificial means at sea, and my old grudge against shipping companies for squandering inestimably precious space on vulgarly ostentatious drawing-rooms, writing-rooms and lounges, to the detriment of the put-upon travellers who are penned up in pigeon-holes, flared up anew.

Besides being illogical, the shipping companies are the worst propagators of snobbery that I know. You travel by rail, and nobody cares what your carriage is; but on a boat the hall-mark of social inferiority is instantly stamped upon you if you're not on the first-class list. Captain, officers, pursers, stewards, waiters, travellers—every soul except the sailors—manifest reverence for first-classers, and undisguised contempt for the rest. The taboo is so strict that a second-classer cannot pay a visit to a first-classer in the lofty spheres where he dwells, nor be invited to dine at his table, although the latter is ready to pay for his meal. I recollect a voyage from Egypt to Naples, during which I ran into the Governor of one of the provinces of the British Sudan, who had accorded me the most lavish hospitality in Africa. He and his wife were in second class; I happened to be in first. Enchanted at the meeting, I asked them to dinner, and received the most stubborn and offensive refusal on the part

of the officials. No, it was impossible; first class was first class and second class was second class, and never the twain should meet—unless it was in the inferior territory, too negligible to count. It was only after I had threatened to inform the captain, and give all the publicity I could to such insulting standards, that a concession was made; but the dinner took place in a small private room, as if my guests were infectious. “A Governor has no business to travel second class,” said the pompous and servile interpreter of shipping-company tradition, the *maitre d’hôtel*.

The voyage was as morose as most ocean journeys are. The ship kept up an incessant monologue, in an inexplicable language of clickings and rumblings and poundings and creakings—with the squeaks of rats thrown in. She went on like a lunatic, furtive, or menacing, or cajoling by turns, and always noisy. The Atlantic misbehaved several times; it gave us an exhibition of seas coming on like rows of houses falling down, which induced an attack of combined sickness and fright. Instead of saying disdainfully to the waves: “You’re nothing but useless and witless *water*,” and so putting them in their place, I felt that cruel and adverse forces were unleashed in those surging mounds of white fury, and, doubting reality, I sank into a nightmare world of inexorable and triumphant evil strength. What a crazily tragical faculty man has of anthropomorphizing! Nine-tenths of his mental pain would vanish if he could only look at things as they are. But he won’t. I anthropomorphized the stars, too, one night, and made the universe more unintelligible than ever. It is true that the stars have disappointed me bitterly. In my childhood I was encouraged to believe that they were as fixed as the Eternal Deity (who, later, was also prized from his niche), so they were inexpressibly consoling, with their beautiful effect of steadfast peace. Now I know they are loose, shifting their positions, streaming through space hither and yon, capering about in a daft *tarentelle*. They, too, are cheating us, and ultimately we

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shan't be able to go by them any more. How can we be expected to keep our heads in a cosmos where even the constellations have the jitters? On the top of all these perturbations, my fellow-passengers, in the brief contacts I had with them, presented me with a new set of worries. Everybody I met turned out to be an American—a prosperous American—and *en bloc* they informed me that I was going to a country where the most admirable, splendid, matchless social, economic and moral structure that had ever adorned our planet, the American System, was being betrayed, sullied, and ruined by a madman, out to be a dictator, who had foisted himself upon the people in a passing hour of disgruntlement, Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It sounded like the rape of a virgin. In Europe, Franklin Delano Roosevelt had not struck me as a rapist, but rather as a doctor; but I did not know enough about his designs on the American System to argue one way or another. By the time the crossing was over, I was afflicted with a lugubrious presentiment that although I was fleeing from Europe to seek refuge in the bosom of a pure democracy, this bosom was singularly agitated, and the grievously sore head I had dreamt of burying in it to be soothed and lulled, might after all be unpleasantly jolted from its place of anticipated repose.

When we actually reached New York, however, my sorrows and misgivings were obliterated by a series of delectable surprises. I had heard a lot, in Europe, about the harshness of American quarantine and immigration officials. Especially did I dread their brutal habit, minutely described by Georges Duhamel in a book which had greatly impressed the French, *Scènes de la Vie future*, of lining you up on parade and publicly exposing your bodily imperfections. I am a middle-aged woman, and keenly sensitive to the pranks time is playing on my waning physical charms. As the ship approached the American coast, I was shepherded into one of the lounges, and told the doctor would soon arrive. I waited anxiously for two hours, wondering whether he

would examine every one of my teeth and ask probing questions as to the conduct of my more secret organs. If a tendency towards a certain inner recalcitrance was a deterrent to landing in the great Republic—and no flaw, however interior, could evade, I had gathered, the eagle eye of American medical inspectors—there was nothing for it but to return ignominiously home. I became more and more nervous. "Where is the doctor?" I inquired at last, deciding it was better to rush upon my fate than stand there like a coward and swooningly expect it. "Oh, he's gone, madam," said the chief steward.

So he had.

Next, arose the question of my leave of stay. This point, too, had appeared very black in Europe. The exactions of the American authorities were copiously set forth in a questionnaire so crude and inquisitorial that it had compelled me to tell lies and thus had burdened my conscience. Furthermore, the authorities seemed excessively capricious. When I had asked the American Consul how long I could sojourn in the United States, he answered that it depended wholly on the discretion of the Immigration Department.

"But to write a book on America I must stay for at least a year," I objected.

"It depends wholly on the discretion of the Immigration Department," repeated the Consul.

"But how can I know they won't send me back after a week?"

"It depends wholly on the discretion of the Immigration Department," said the Consul patiently.

"But what, then, is the sense of my making such an expensive journey if I cannot be certain they will let me do my work?"

"It depends wholly on the discretion of the Immigration Department," replied the Consul with finality.

Full of the most dismal forebodings, therefore, I confronted a very spruce United States Immigration officer on



the ship. He was sitting at a desk and I handed him my passport. "How long do you wish to remain in America?" he inquired.

"Three months," I whispered tremblingly.

"Right."

I took heart. "Perhaps I could remain six?" I asked, inconceivably daring.

"Sure."

I shall always admire my brain for having reacted so quickly. "I'd really like to spend twelve," it said, while the rest of me felt dizzy.

"Good."

"Inspector!" I cried wildly. "I want eighteen after all!"

"Why not?" said that true and handsome gentleman.

And eighteen months it was.

Lastly, there was the ordeal of the Customs. I had been told again and again, at home, that they beat all description. Compared with them gangsters were Sunday-school pupils. They were authentic sadists. They poked their noses and their fingers into each nook, crevice, cranny and corner of trunks and suitcases and hat-boxes. They mangled everything. They threw all you owned upon the ground, and with shouts of ferocious glee, they assessed it fabulously. Not the most infinitesimal bottle of perfume got past them. Indeed, the only practical way to satisfy their requirements was to land in America naked, with an empty bag in your hand.

Now a perfectly awful thing had happened to me. When my cook had packed, she had collected some books at random and put them in a case. Only on board did I discover that among them was a copy of *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. It was the original unexpurgated edition, and though I consider it the dullest of all the products of cloacal literature, it was too valuable to toss into the ocean. But what in God's name to do with it? If I declared it in virtuous clean-living

America, it would be confiscated, and I'd start my visit with a dossier. Well did I know that once you get a dossier, it accompanies you to beyond the grave. If I tried to smuggle it through, indubitably the Customs officers would find me out. If the Customs officers found me out, they'd give me over to the police. If they gave me over to the police, third degree would be applied. All the lurid detective and press stories I had read, all the savage films I had seen about the American police and third degree, came pouring back into my cowering mind. I was distraught. Furiously I said to *Lady Chatterley's Lover*: "Whatever doom overtakes me, I shall not let you contaminate further a respectable woman's appurtenances. Into the dirty-linen sack you go, where you rightfully belong."

I was suffocating with apprehension when two Customs officers approached me in the huge imposing shed where I had stood for ages. I looked at them. They were not neckless, square-jowled, scowling bandits, as I had been led to believe. They were ordinary human beings who were smiling. I gave a gasp that reverberated through the hall.

"Tired?" they said kindly. "It's been a long wait this morning."

I really did go faint—but with relief. "I am an old, old woman," I murmured weakly, "and I think I shall fall down right here."

"Don't do that, lady," they urged me cheerfully. "Hold on for just another second and all your troubles will be over." They unlocked one trunk out of seven battered pieces of luggage, and took a peep at its topmost layer. "Anything beside personal effects?"

"Nothing beside personal effects," I answered with the strictest literal truth.

"Okay," said those adorable people, and summoned a porter to carry my baggage away.

## § 4

My pæan of gratitude to American officials had not yet ended when my taxi stopped before a down-town hotel. "How much?" I asked as I stepped out.

I forget what the taxi-man demanded for the baggage, but he clapped on two dollars more for the trip. I was rudely switched from the American Civil Service to American Private Enterprise.

"Two dollars!" I repeated shrilly, calculating what that represented in francs. "Nonsense! We haven't been driving for more than five minutes. Where's your meter?"

He had instantaneously turned up his flag. "Well, really!" I exclaimed, sincerely outraged. "Fancy an American doing to a European in America what the Europeans do to the Americans in Europe!"

"What's that?" asked the taxi-man.

"Cheat them, of course," I said.

And only then realized fully the preposterous import of my words—how prodigious, how redoubtable, how unnatural, how altogether superhuman were my expectations of these United States.

## CHAPTER II

### OF THE METROPOLIS' NEW YORK

#### § I

LET'S get this straight from the outset. As a European, I am accustomed to think that the metropolis of a country is by and large representative of that country, and displays characteristics, trends and activities which, although they are centralized and intensified in the capital will be found, in a varying degree, everywhere in the nation. It is perfectly legitimate to say, after a prolonged sojourn in London, that one has acquired some idea of the general disposition and civilization of the English; in Paris, of the French; in Stockholm, of the Swedes. I therefore assumed, when I got to New York, that it was representative, in the same way, of America—and so I started wrong from the very beginning, for New York is the complete exception to a universal rule. If New York were cut from its moorings to-morrow and drifted off into the Atlantic, the growth and significance of America would remain entirely unaffected. But that I could not know until I had seen America. Reacting violently to New York, I believed that I was reacting to America, and at first the heart went out of me.

The spectacle New York presented was neither the democracy, nor the ethic, nor the culture of which, in spite of the warnings of Philip, I had so eagerly dreamt. From the point of view of a political and social example to Europe, it was utterly worthless, and God help mankind if the values it flaunted were to become the standards of the world! When we had devoured each other in Europe, was this thing

to take over the spiritual and intellectual destinies of our species? Then the remnant of us would perish in a different, but certainly not less ignoble manner. I was overwhelmed, and being overwhelmed, stuck like a fly on a fly-paper to the very scene that was undermining my morale.

What saved me was that after a short time I got such an acute attack of claustrophobia that the instinct of self-defence jerked me out of my dejection. I went about New York feeling that in another minute I'd break into a yell, and fling my clenched fists right and left and punch a hole in every damned high building in every damned narrow street to send them reeling backward, and let in the space, light and sky for which I was organically panting. Philip remarked that my fists were a particularly anæmic composition of flesh and bone, and that the skyscrapers were steel and concrete—and he seized the occasion to hint at impending lunacy. I became so frightened that I leapt into energy, packed, and straightway took to the road. Thus began my long trail throughout the country, during which I recovered my balance, gained perspective, changed all my ideas, and fell undyingly in love with America. But because of those first three months in New York, the disconcerted misery they inflicted and the lurid distortions they produced, I made a little vow, that I would address a formal petition to the Federal Government of the United States, urgently praying that NO foreign author going there for the first time to write on America should be allowed to disembark in the metropolis. Let us land anywhere else, in Boston, Charleston, New Orleans, San Francisco—*anywhere!*—but not in New York. New York ought to be visited only on our way home, after the country and the people have been seen and heard, knowledge acquired, and points of comparison established. So will this city, as unlike the rest of America as I am unlike, physically and mentally, a cherub (I can't imagine a more drastic dissimilarity, unless I compare myself with the Virgin Mary), be relegated to its true place and proper

rôle, cease to be a stumbling-block to all fervent well-wishers of America, and become simply the subject of a monograph—which it unquestionably merits. So, too, will it stop being the source of the torrent of false, ignorant and grotesque books which, given their unavoidable initial misconception, European writers offer to their public, in quite good faith, as pictures of America.

Americans may answer that whatever Europe thinks of America, she will go on, so it does not matter. But they would be mistaken, for as long as truth and hope matter, it is necessary that errors, however unintentional, should not darken the mind of humanity, and that faith in the American land and the American people should not be extinguished. For of all the possible bearers of a re-creating message, of all the possible builders of a civilization which may one day encompass and illuminate the world, America, when she will have reached her maturity and determined her values, is the most likely.

## § 2

“How utterly senseless!”

This was my original opinion of New York. It did not refer to the architecture or the people, but to the site. The greatest metropolis of the planet from the angle of finance, business, brains, talent, invention and mechanical civilization, and the second greatest as to population, is built not on the Atlantic mainland, as is often assumed in Europe, but upon an island called Manhattan. The city grew and stretched until it now includes other islands and several river banks. But the thought and pulse of New York, its directing activities, its characteristic spectacles, its hugest buildings and one-fourth of its inhabitants, are lumped, pressed, squeezed and concentrated on a pin-head of rock, twelve and a half miles long and two and a half miles broad.

And there were one billion nine hundred and three million acres of land to choose from in America! I ask you earnestly: if this is not senselessness, what is?

Once upon a time Manhattan belonged to the Indians, and they sold it in 1624 to the Dutch for the sum of sixty guilders in merchandise. Though the deal was carried out more than three centuries ago, its spirit, jumping far ahead, conformed to the best traditions of modern commerce, for both sides cheated and both were had: the Dutch shamelessly undercut prices in treating with the ignorant savages, but the ignorant savages neglected to inform the Dutch that the northern end of the island was inhabited by a stronger tribe, with which the smart White Men then had to make another barter. For some two hundred years Manhattan kept its wooded hills and smiling fields and pleasant dales, its score of rivulets and brooks, its flowers, birds and game, but in 1811 a "city plan" was made. They say that the commissioners who made that plan were discussing one day together near a pit where workmen screened gravel. With a cane, they drew a map of the place on the ground. The sun, shining through the screen, threw its criss-cross pattern on the drawing. "There's the plan!" cried the commissioners, and New York was forthwith doomed to those darkened rigid lines. Ever since then, they have continued to level the hills, fill up the valleys, swallow the fields and bury the streams—flattening and crushing the island into the most soul-deadening rows of stone, concrete and steel rectangles you ever saw.

That, however, you discover later. Your first vision of New York is completely different. As you approach the city, coming from Europe, you sail between several little islands: Ellis Island, where the immigrants land and are examined (and a lot of balderdash one talks, too, about Ellis Island! It is very humanely run, like an admirable modern administration—toys for the children, showers, free clothes, a cinema, excellent food in the dining-hall, the Jews having

a special table for their ritualistically-prepared meals. Where the devil do you get such consideration shown to immigrants anywhere in Europe?); Governors Island; Bedloe's Island, on which everlastingly and ponderously stands the Statue of Liberty, one hundred and fifty-one feet tall. That Statue of Liberty is about the most glacial thing that exists, and it is sad to think that a Frenchman, Bartholdi, created it. It represents a thick, rigid, blank-faced peasant woman, clad in a sort of bronze nightgown, imperiously warning off, with a torch, trespassers from the American shore. Her menacing arm is that of a police officer bawling "Halt." The guide-books carefully draw your attention to the fact that although the French Government sent the statue to America as a present, the city had to pay for the pedestal, which is one hundred and fifty-five feet high. Whether that is a reflection on French thrift, which always moves France, even in her most generous gestures, to economize panic-stricken on some trifle at the very last moment, or on hard-headed American practicality, which looks even a gift horse in the mouth, I cannot say. Anyhow, I would not call the Statue of Liberty a very inspiring symbol of light irresistibly flooding a reclaimed world, and it is calculated to freeze a foreigner rather than encourage him. But as one draws near to the admirably spacious and orderly docks of Manhattan Island, the sky-line of New York arises, and takes one's breath away. It is impossible to do anything but gape—and gape whole-heartedly, without a thought of criticism or restriction. I am ready to believe there is no spectacle like it at present in the world.

Towers mount from a perfectly flat piece of land almost on the level of the sea, towers of unequal height, roofed with spires or with rectangles, all of them white, stark, straight, massive, stupendous, into the pale blue vault. No background; not a mountain, not a hill, not a tree. Water, air, paleness, weight and height—such a shock of strangeness came upon me that every time I remember my arrival the



sense of an invincible unfamiliarity dominates me again. This town, in its quintessentially simple setting of sky and sea, presents itself from the beginning as an invention of man's brains and as the work of man's hands. Neither God nor Nature had a finger in this pie. Its hardness, its fineness and its terrific articulateness are due to man alone. He took a normally pretty fragment of earth and reduced it to nakedness; then he struck out and made from its sheer expressionlessness, as no one ever made anywhere before—harsh, gaunt, mighty and implacable—an embodiment of his fancies and needs. That embodiment grew and swelled so promptly and so monstrously that now it has become inhuman, completely out of proportion to his stature and natural design; it is wiping him more and more out of the picture; his very mastery is his conqueror, and he himself is being subdued. But whatever catastrophes his dangerous genius brings upon him in the future, he has wrought a vision which one carries ineffaceably in one's mind: that first vision of New York when one advances upon it from the ocean, a scene of mortal power and grandeur, utterly unprecedented, and almost august.

### § 3

It's just as well that I should have got this impression at the start, for when I sallied forth to scrutinize New York, I thought it the most ugly, violent, and meaningless capital city, *per se*, that I had ever struck. I think so still. Of course there are high spots of loveliness, like the Battery with its unique Aquarium, Washington Square and the incomparable George Washington Bridge, which spans the Hudson River, so light, so lithe, so pure in line, carrying you up and up, as a bridge should do, into a dream. But the lay-out of the town is unpicturesque and unyielding in the extreme. It is divided geometrically, so that from north to south long

avenues run parallel to each other, and are cut at right angles, every few minutes, by streets that go from east to west. At each end of the avenues and the streets are fixed, colourless, the sea and the sky; if suddenly a madness descended upon you, and you dashed down the long straight vistas, east and west and south and north you'd spring off the edge of the world into the void. It is a relentlessly precise disposition, which allows neither romance, nor gentleness, nor grace to creep in; there is no room for squares, open spaces or gardens, for history, commemoration, or caprice. Other towns in America, such as Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, evolved gradually and normally; the old sections fused, preserving their shape, their traits, their monuments, and developed into modernity with their antiquity still enclosed within them. But this fierce place looks as if it had bounded into existence at one stroke; the processes of its expansion are not unfolded; in fact, they have been impatiently erased. Unstable and ambitious in its moods, New York constantly changes its standards; suddenly it decides that it has had enough of one phase and plunges headlong into another; it obliterates the landmarks and contours and features of its own evolution. It preserves nothing because it cherishes nothing, and going about the impersonal wilderness that its versatility has created, you understand why a city which has no unexpectedness also has no real beauty, and that it cannot inspire love when it is bereft of intimacy. It is so monotonous and so invariable that it is faceless, and at last you crave physically for the irregularities, the whimsicalities, the breaks and incongruities of the European towns, which have retained their individuality by respecting at least part of their past. I almost dissolved into tears when I discovered Washington Square and Riverview Terrace, and saw the old, low, crumpled red houses with the creepers clothing them so densely, and the moss-stained alleys paved with stones—and when I was taken to London Terrace, Stuyvesant Place, Milligan Place, I wanted to

gather them up in my arms and embrace them, it was such a relief to contemplate something in which a fragile, faded, familiar emotion still unbelievably lingered. Uniformity, conformity, circumscription, prescription, limitation, pressure: they weigh on you on every side; you can't stand back to gaze at an edifice, there is no space; each building touches its neighbour, there is no gap—why, even the churches have no enclosures, but are welded into the ghastly brick blocks that flank them! (Can you imagine a *church* hemmed in by offices and shops? You can't, if you are from Europe, but New York not only imagined it, it did it.) Nothing is set apart, nothing is secluded, nothing is free. It's all as formless, characterless and charmless as an everlasting piece of rolled-out linoleum.

There are, perhaps, half a dozen buildings which arrest your attention, like St. Paul's and its long slim spire and its old graveyard, in those dreary shadowed parts of lower Broadway where the big banks resemble nothing so much as opulent modern prisons, complete even to the fully-armed policeman on every floor; the church of St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery; a Catholic Home in State Street; the Public Library in Fifth Avenue. But I couldn't describe to you a single house; they just didn't "register," so I presume there was nothing to be registered, for in general I react pretty quickly to what is unusual. Not that the architecture is always the same; it does vary in some of its features and colours, but no variation seems worth remembering. Monuments? None you ever want to look at again. And very few of them at that. New York has no gratitude, no reverence, and sweeps its living and its dead into oblivion. No courts: not even back-yards—only twisting iron fire-escapes. No water-front in this city encircled by sea and rivers: all walled up and put to commercial uses. A handful of stunted wilted poisoned trees; as verdure, the best that could be done for the great avenues was to train ivy over wire frameworks; I've seen many absurd things in my life, but this one caught

me by the throat, it was so sorrowful and silly at the same time. Only one park in the town itself, Central Park, ringed by skyscrapers and mostly bleak because of the rocky soil and the strong and frequent winds. It is a miracle, however, that it should be there at all, in a place where the little land that exists is worth fabulous prices, and it has an exceptional attraction, a most delightful and well-kept zoo which is my undoing, for whenever I go into the Park for a breath of fresh air, I succumb to the animals and spend all the time I should devote to a very necessary constitutional, rapt in front of their cages. (There are other parks, real, magnificent parks—the Bronx, the Van Cortlandt, Pelham Bay—but they are so far, you have to travel through so many hideous miles of subways and concrete to reach them, that when you arrive you are as spiritless as a corpse. And then you have to travel back through the same hideous miles.) New York possesses at present an energetic and incorruptible Commissioner of Parks, who has carried through, almost violently and at tremendous expense, playgrounds for the children. I would not say that they move one to unbounded exhilaration, for they are made of unpainted concrete, and unpainted concrete eschews suggestions of gaiety or reverie, but the small tatterdemalions of New York can run and swing and toss their balls there safely, beyond the threat of the murderous cars. Everywhere else, you are trapped. I tell you that this city has been clapped into a strait-jacket, and struggle as desperately as you may, it constricts you and frustrates you and stifles you at every turn.

“What about the skyscrapers?” you will ask inevitably. Well, they are quite logical; they carry the strait-jacket into the firmament, and partition it just as the “city plan” partitions the ground. I went to a great deal of trouble to be fair to the skyscrapers. I had heard and read such a lot, pro and con, about them that as I pride myself on my impartiality, I resolved to give them the best chance possible to state their case before I blessed or damned them defi-

nitively. At first they seemed to me just implausible, but then the whole of New York seemed to me implausible, so I could not make out whether they alone were the villains of the piece. After a few days of disgiuntlement, however, I felt it was necessary to form an opinion, so I rented a room, outside my own apartment, on the thirty-fifth story of a hotel, where I roped myself tightly, waist and ankles, to the balustrade of my window—for I have an irresistible urge towards suicide when I look out from anything above a basement. And for several afternoons I cricked my neck conscientiously, gazing at the tremendous panorama on every side. Those were dreadful, dreadful hours, and I shall never forget them. Not only did my neck ache, my head reel, and my stomach sink, but my attention was agonizedly distracted by a workman, thirty feet beneath me, perched on a swinging seat against the wall of the hotel, doing something to its front, untied, unheld, with a cigarette in his mouth. I was terrified that he would fall, and I was terrified to startle him by screeching that he should clutch tight. Also, how could he have worked if he had clutched tight? It is true that I have never known a mason who really wished to get on with his job, but by ill-luck that particular proletarian might have been just the phenomenon I had never encountered. It was a horrible problem.

The air—that sun-and-sea air of New York which has no rival anywhere for headiness and buoyancy—was the crispest, most invigorating draught pouring into you. There are times when you feel you can live on that air alone. The pale light firmament, which nothing at all blocked out, enveloped pale light buildings, upthrust. It seemed to me that I was looking at an exhibition, schematic and stylized, rigged up for the occasion, and oddly inconsistent. It hypnotized me, it was all so white, so clear, so cold, so tall, so remote, so completely unreal—yes, especially it was unreal. These forms, seen from so far, so clean, severe and thin, woke in me a quick sweeping desire to touch them, to group them

and play with them, like the bricks I handled and piled up when I was a child. Indeed, the skyscrapers of New York flung me back into the dreams and tragedies of the nursery, where one gets drunk with the pride of building towers, citadels and houses so high, so high, so very very high, that all at once they can't rise any higher and fall to pieces in a rush of ruin on the floor. A queer transposition took place in me—I held my breath as if just there, under my gaze, New York, which had lost its equilibrium, was going to topple down like my game.

Thinking the whole thing over, however, when I had disentangled myself from that profound impression of strange straight tall white beauty, I began to perceive that the latter is due almost entirely to scale and to the accident of colour. To my mind, the skyscrapers of New York have no significance as examples of creative art. Analysed, they are preternaturally simple. They have height, straightness and whiteness, but fundamentally that is all they have. They are sheer, without decoration or inventiveness. If they were dark, and cut down to ordinary dimensions, they'd only be huge, unimaginative, unornamented blocks. A very small replica of the Parthenon, of Notre Dame, of Angkor Vat, for instance, would still be a marvel, but a very small replica of a New York skyscraper could excite neither interest nor admiration. These buildings are not the artist's or the architect's problem, but the problem of the engineer—a question, not of that illuminating irrationality called genius, but of strains and stresses, pressures, alloys and mixtures: of mechanics, in a word. Outside that field they mean nothing, and convey no message at all.

It is true that their appearance has much improved, and I was interested to note their phases from the Flat-Iron on Broadway, thin, undignified, unmitigatedly ugly; the Woolworth Building, a terrible European excrescence, a sort of exaggerated pseudo-Gothic church tower; the Empire State Building, a shaft which has no merit but that of an unbeliev-

able hugeness; the immense new hotels, merely amplified cubes, to the Rockefeller Centre, where a really superb attempt has been made to use the advantages large scale affords. Consciously designed and zoned, its majesty belongs to its proportions, not only to its size; even if it were little, its shape would retain loveliness. It is a great pity that the interior resembles that of a super-modern, super-gorgeous, super-vulgar railway station, and that two European painters were entrusted with the murals, which are excruciatingly dull. The pretty evergreen-and-fountain courtyard possesses a dreadful gold statue of Prometheus, enclosed in a circle, right down on the ground. Not only is he doomed to an impossible physical posture, neither lying nor standing, but pinned by one of his buttocks to a rock; he is also played upon by vigorous jets of water which try, most inappropriately, to extinguish his fire. For a long time I could not make out what he was, though my New York friends suggested that he might be the American male trying to escape from the wedding-ring, or the United States going off the gold standard. Both explanations were plausible. On the other hand, the statue of Atlas ascending, the crossed empty rings of the globe on his back, his muscles bursting and his admirably hideous face frowning, is magnificent. It is also evident that the New York architects must have been strongly influenced by Freudian symbolism, or they would hardly have crowned so many of their erections with totems more reminiscent of erotic Pompeii than of a city founded by the rigorous sons of the Reformation—emblems they insist, too, on lighting up with a most indecent emphasis at night. The top of the Empire State Building compels a continent woman to flee at once into a church and call upon Saint Anthony for protection: I do not think it moral that she should be thus wrought up.

Still, in spite of my opinion that the modern architecture has scarcely any intrinsic beauty, it is incontestable that it achieves, before you are bored by its impersonality and same-

ness, an awe-striking effect. Once more as I write I see, as I saw them from that thirty-fifth story window, the gigantic white structures, rearing their unbroken lines above streets like dark, dank, narrow gulleys; above swift, black, shining cars like cockroaches; above passers-by like pin-heads. Built by man for man, those structures have reduced man to the merest speck, and his activities, at their great feet, to nonsense. On the bare, harsh, inflexible city, they have imposed an imprint that is unique. Quite suddenly, as happens again and again to everyone looking at New York, critical reason is swept away. The whole thing is drama, dynamics on the high-explosive plane. By day the towers trample the town brutally, like a wild and disorderly herd of mastodons reckless of direction, of logic, of peace. When dusk begins to fall, they turn into a giant fantasy. The low houses huddle together in masses of shadows, and standing on this obscure and confused footstool, the abnormal shapes, pushed up through the earth by a blasting force nothing can hinder, vault, savage and silent, into the bloodless evening sky. What barbarism they contain! I keep fighting against their arrogant and callous spirit, for I am old-fashioned, believing in the virtue of humility, and my philosophy is embodied in the soaring forms of cathedrals, with the open palms of their spires imploring a universal force of goodness to strengthen the individual efforts of men to love. But these blocks are a bundle of weapons—violent fists which challenge and threaten an emptied and inert dome. Fierce, powerful, proud, but ultimately stupid beyond expression, the man-built towers of New York have violated a heaven from which the deities have fled. And while one is gazing, stunned, at this triumphant outrage, into the spreading blackness spring, one after the other, the squares and oblongs of the lighted windows, till the entire city becomes a flaming gold and orange mosaic, a limitless and resplendent sheet of jewelled night.



## § 4

Cogitations on the aspect of New York from a thirty-fifth story, however invaluable they might be from an intellectual standpoint, could not continue indefinitely, for that hotel room was very dear. So I was obliged to change my angle, and descending to earth again, pursued my reflections on foot. Here is a batch of them. It's a hodge-podge, but the order does not matter very much, and in any case I'm not compiling a Baedeker.

1. Let me inform you instantly, with an acrimony which proves what my sufferings were, that to explore New York on foot is suicidal because of the fatigue—but unless you can afford to pay for countless expensive taxis, which spend far more time ticking up cents at the stops of the crossroads than while they are running, there is no alternative. “No alternative?” you will ingenuously say. “How can that be? Is there no public transportation in what the Americans proclaim is the Most Efficient City in the World?” Ha! Of all the dirty, noisy, incompetent systems of communications that men have ever bungled, the metropolis of the United States possesses by far and away the worst. Everything I shall write in the following paragraphs is a gutless understatement of the realities.

*The buses.* Long, low, narrow, they are driven by surly wattmen from whom you can't extract one civil word of direction, and staffed by dour sullen conductors who shove under your nose in silence a little ringing box into which you must press your exact fare. Nobody cares where you go. Nobody helps you. Nobody even advises you. If you don't know your way, you just don't get there, and that's all there is to it.

*The street-cars.* The same goes for them, plus more shabbiness and dinginess, a heavier reek of petrol, and such a screech, such a clanking, such a rattling, such joltings that you have no breath left in your body to curse them. Neither

buses nor street-cars take any sort of trouble to inform you of their routes. In the whole town, there is not a single board at the bus-stops to tell you the number and destination of the conveyances that race past. You jump hopelessly on because you are so sick of waiting, and you jump desperately off because somebody or other growls at you that you won't reach that place. The vehicles belong to a score of different companies, there is not the faintest glimmer of co-ordination between them, most of them go up and down, a few go across, you might just as well be on a mad camel running amuck in the desert. Efficiency, indeed! Hottentots would have planned better.

*The Elevated*, or train rolling along on a track in the air. The Elevated must be seen to be believed, for no one could be perverted enough to imagine, out of his own head, such ugliness, such griminess, such a huddle of hideous black tinny stations, such insane criss-crossings, such immorality (you look straight into a hundred thousand interiors and discover all their privacies as the Elevated bellows alongside their unprotected windows), and such a welter, a Bedlam, a chaos of noises that compared with it the howls of all the savages in Africa banging every primitive instrument invented since the beginning of Time, supported by an artillery bombardment and supplemented by the yells of all the coyotes, jackals, hyænas and wolves in the world, as well as by the hoots and shrieks of all the owls, would sound like a Schubert symphony. You can go anywhere on the Elevated for a nickel (five cents), and take my word for it, it's dear at that.

*The Subway*, which New Yorkers are brazen enough to think corresponds to the civilized solicitous London Tube and the trim quick Paris Métro, is in the bowels of the earth and represents the dreariest form of Hell. No human language can describe it. You wander through its evil stations, sombre as cellars and filthy as drains, and you can search until your eyes wear out for a sign, a row of lights, a list of places, any

trace or kind of indication. Not an official, not a name, not a syllable of information, except here and there a boorish order to "Push," or "Keep off," or "Stop." Just like that: as if you were an Untouchable. All the welcome you receive from the Subway when at last, battling with your loathing, you sit gingerly on the edge of the worn, squalid, greasy benches, which may have been yellow half a century ago and now are dirt consolidated, ankle deep in chocolate paper, banana skins and the shells of peanuts, and the entire black, dismal, sordid contraption hurls itself screaming, thumping, jangling, shaking, like the disgraceful old junk which it is, through the mephitic night—all the welcome, I repeat, consists of a series of notices shouting at you rudely that if you spit, you'll go to prison for one year or pay five hundred dollars fine. Why, the churlish assumption that you are such a barbarian would shock you even if you were the public in primitive half-naked woolly-haired Ethiopia -- and here you have it thrown in your face in the greatest city of America! Moreover, if you go wrong, which you cannot help doing since that curmudgeon of a Subway scorns to guide you right, you disburse, from one quay to another, your fare to the brigand all over again! I wish the Subway had a neck to wring: my hands would be promptly at work.

It is the vehicle of the poor, and by heaven! how it rubs in the fact! It jams them, presses them, jerks them, neglects them. There they ride, the underprivileged of New York, smelly, dirty, harried, grey, dim, sodden, with slowly-rotating chewing jaws. I have never seen a passably well-dressed person in those cars. I have hardly ever seen a cheerful animated face: even the Negroes seem joyless. Seedy, harassed and submissive to its indignities, they let the Subway crush out of them what bit of spirit the day's toil and uncertainties had left. They push you and shove you and jostle you out of their path, and when they can, they pick-pocket you, but without malevolence; they are so far gone that they are only indifferent—such an unstimulable indiffer-

ence that you feel that if you dropped dead they would not even turn their dulled eyes to give your corpse a glance. I too become witless in the Subway. A conviction descends upon me that the Lord God has found me out at length; all the good I have omitted and the wickedness I have committed clamp me down on my disgusting seat; it's of no mortal use to hope I shall avoid my fate and retribution; and on and on (also for a nickel) that terrific stinking yowling thing carries me into despair. By the time Philip, furious and exhausted, has managed to pull me out of my catalepsy, I am miles beyond my terminus. Never have I taken the Subway without having to finish my trip in a cab.

2. The streets of New York are very drab and cement-lined, with too many cracked chipped patched-up pavements due to the lack of æstheticism of the municipal authorities, and an air of frightful unkemptness due to the lack of tidiness of the public, which has a most offensive trick of scattering litter everywhere, as if the city were an ash-can. The avenues are just wider and longer editions of the streets: some of them look very opulent, others ordinary, the rest mean. I do not know why they are called avenues: they haven't the nobility one associates with that word. Like the streets in England, the New York thoroughfares seem to me quite funless, and for the same reason, which only a Continental will understand. In France, in Italy, in Greece, in all Central Europe, you dwell in the street. You talk scandal, you discuss politics, you flirt, you quarrel, you dawdle in the street. You eat and drink in it. You play in it. You sit in it and look at it as you look at the screen in a cinema. It shows you a hundred thousand little pictures; it makes you laugh; it brings you adventures. People gesticulate, act, shout in the street as though it were both a stage and a communal playground; you can participate in the game, or philosophize on the tiny, varied, incessant scenes it presents. Animated, familiar, dramatic, microcosmic, it is a source of

contacts and draws into the stream of life those who saunter through it. The sense of human fellowship is reinforced there.

But in the big American towns, as in the English towns, the streets are only channels leading from one spot to another. You take them because you have to go from one spot to another. They signify a commencement, from which you start, and an end, to which you arrive. It is not the street that is important (especially as it is numbered, not named, and thus sounds unhomely) but the two extremes which it links; and down it pours a torrent of indifferent, preoccupied, unamused strangers who wouldn't dream of being interested in anything but their own affairs. In the street, they are not *of* it, but just use it as they pass. I might add that there are relatively few dogs in the New York streets—a boon one appreciates fervently when one remembers how in London one is crowded off every sidewalk by the hordes of dogs lifting their legs and tails all over the place; hardly any babies—outside the slums, that is; and that never once did I meet a pregnant woman promenading. There must be expectant mothers, but they don't flaunt their inflatedness as expansively as they do in Europe.

Speaking of streets calls the traffic to mind; it deserves a mention, for it is admirably regulated by lights which hold it up at short intervals. The ambulances with their ominous moan, the beautiful scarlet-and-gold fire engines with their uncanny keening, the police cars with their imperious scream, disregard the flashing red and green signals, but the drivers of automobiles don't: a very surprising proof of discipline in such a reckless city. It is, I am sorry to say, the pedestrians, to whose company I belong, who disobey the traffic laws. There must be something in the air of New York that turns them into jay-walkers: instantly, and even more than in Paris, where they are quite as great a pest as the incorrigibly crazy taximen. There is no necessity to become a jay-walker, for the stops are considerably brief--

except when you are in a taxi - but the fact is that one does. Rather than wait ninety seconds at the crossroads, you project yourself straight into the traffic against the red lights, between two roaring taxis, round the tail of a colossal bus, with a very excellent chance of barging full tilt into a giant truck tearing up on the other side. I confess I am entitled to the very fancy names the drivers apply to me. By the way, the New York drivers are particularly talkative and knowledgeable companions; local politics and rackets are to them an open book, and they are very independent in their judgments. But it is saddening to find that in their opinion, backed by incontrovertible personal experience, three-fourths of the population of New York consists of Lousy Crooks. And again and again their stories gave me a passing glimpse of a world I try to take in, but cannot: a fungoid world, inhabited by cold snakes, where there is not passion, not fanaticism, not hatred, but frigid implacably planned evil. Listening to these incredible tales of racketeers and gangsters, one begins to understand, even though one does not approve, the brutal appearance of almost all the New York policemen, those tall, burly, remorseless-looking men, heavily armed, their truncheon welded to their hand. I never fell out with the police in New York, but I had no desire to snuggle up against them; somehow one feels that their truncheons are so constantly in use that, quite automatically and absent-mindedly, they might well come into contact with one's own head.

3. The shops. Well, let's make no bones about it: in general they are superior to what we have in Europe, and in the dozen or so streets which cluster east and west of Fifth Avenue, they are the finest in the world. Outside a museum, it would be impossible to see displays of more beautiful things. But it is not only the contents of the shops that are so remarkable. New York has elaborated a technique of window-dressing that has attained to art. (In this field, even Paris lags behind, and as for aesthetically beighted

London, where window-dressing consists of stacking merchandise with as much discrimination as in a warehouse, it hasn't begun to make a start.) The advertising sense is fully there, of course, but what predominates is an inventiveness and a taste so impeccable that they constitute a training for the spectator, releasing his imagination as well as appealing to his eye. As I write I remember the staging, in one of the great stores, of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*: a ballet of startlingly sculptured wooden mannequins in vivid superlatively modern colours and fashions against a background which could not have been bettered by the Ballets Russes; of Swinburne's *Hounds of Spring*, where damsels and dogs were made of every kind of vernal leaf and flower; of surrealist models whose hats were flaming baskets of carrots, radishes, beetroots, cabbages, and under whose long narrow hands a telephone receiver had somehow turned into a lobster; of bowls of goldfish so arranged that they represented smiling faces showing the jauntiest new modes - yes, I know it sounds daft, but the marvel is that it was suggestive and lovely; of a real full-size Colonial house surrounded by a grass garden, complete in every detail from the porcelain bathrooms with satin shower curtains to the cocktail room, where a piano was inserted in the bar. Constantly the shops pour original notions and knowledge into the public mind. The huge five-and-ten-cent stores alone are a revelation to the European, for it is a lesson in modern material civilization to look at the hundreds of thousands of novel and convenient gadgets they exhibit.

This ingenuity and this wealth of choice are quasi-universal, for the small shops imitate the big ones immediately, so the high standards of the latter spread, and thanks to mass production, the copies are very cheap. You may object that it makes for a wearisome sameness; that is true, for clothes and furniture all quickly become much too much alike, and unless you are a millionaire, it is impossible to own in America an original dress or an original home—but who

would not rather see monotonous comfort and brightness than monotonous dirt, drabness and inefficiency? Nowhere else can you buy such pleasant, useful, diverting articles so inexpensively, and one must acknowledge that the endless song the Americans put up about the excellence of their goods, though irritating to a European ear, is entirely justified by the facts.

But although the New York shops are an education in taste and comfort, I feel uneasily that something should be done about them—some Sumptuary Law passed, as in old Republican Rome. They are too numerous, too insistent, too go-ahead. It is all right to arouse incentive in people, but they go beyond that and arouse cupidity. I firmly believe that the temper of New York, which is unsurpassably acquisitive, is in a great measure due to them. They tempt the eye so uninterruptedly that not only is a state of permanent envy, covetousness, lust and all-malice established, but a state of permanent dissatisfaction as well—for no sooner have you been lured into buying an article than the shops display something more perfected still, and so you are never allowed to rest content. No, I am not joking. If one of the most distinctive aspects of American civilization is the overwhelming abundance of, and the corroding desire for, toys; if the angle from which the average American envisages civilization is that of a multiplication and accumulation of things, the shops must be held partly responsible for such an outlook. The vividness and persistence with which they suggest that the aim of your life should be to possess what they contain are infinitely more dangerous than Satan's silly old trick of showing you the dominions of the earth from a high mountain. What sane man wants to be pestered and harassed by empires? Only the maniacs do, like our dictators, and, mark my words, they'll all finish badly. But what the shops present is the wherewithal to make existence immediately more lovely, easy, smooth, convenient, pleasant, successful, and before you know what you've done, you've made



that little spurt in greed or dishonesty which brings you in the extra money you need to be "happy."

(I tell you this is a bad, bad, city. Listen to what it did to me. My publisher and his friendly wife gave me one night a scrumptious dinner. Inadvertently I departed with one of their embroidered doyleys, and next morning I found it in my bag. I said: "Oh, how nice! It will make a ravishing handkerchief. *I shall keep it.*" Then I realized what I had said, and came-to on the floor, so that I have the faint consolation of thinking that my conscience did react. Or perhaps Philip hit me. But never in my life before, through all the chops and changes, sins and errors, of a highly variegated career, had I contemplated robbing a hostess. It couldn't have been truly me. It was New York. Do not come to New York unless you are already a Communist, when you can steal anything you like without a qualm, all property having, Saint Marx tells you, its tainted source in a universal thieving.)

4. Broadway. Though this is a street, it cannot be included in a general section. It is unique and must have a description to itself. A very independent thoroughfare, it wanders and rambles unprofessionally and quite contrary to the "city plan," which assumes it to go straight. It also changes its aspect according to the part of the town into which it happens to have strayed; sometimes it is pure slum, sometimes millions-worth ponderous ornate financial skyscrapers. But its fame comes from its central portion, the "Roaring Forties," chock-full of theatres, cinemas, music halls, cabarets and eating-houses. In the daytime Broadway reveals itself to be the most incongruous street in the city, grey, askew, undignified, with a skyscraper here and a wooden shack there. A Greek temple complete with pediment, columns and capitals is surmounted by an enormous jackboot and rubs shoulders with a sweet-shop decorated with coco-nuts and fetishes in the best West African style; a modern theatre lies side by side with a village fair-booth or a soft-drinks stall representing

a corner of Tahiti, where bananas smother you and pseudo-American sailors serve out spurious fruit-juices in tall glasses. The Times Building rears up like the prow of a dreadnought: everywhere cluster Chinese restaurants, Negro shows, Italian movies, Sports Palaces in which you lose your money at the most ingeniously silly games, and hundreds of small, flashy, amazingly low-priced shops overflowing with hats, lingerie, dresses and false jewellery, which remain open so far into the night that you can't help wondering what their real business is. Impossible to imagine a more shoddy, incompatible, fantastic medley.

But as soon as dusk falls, Broadway bursts into a scintillation which has no equal in America or anywhere else in the world. In an illumination more blinding than a tropical day at its zenith, amid the thump and clatter and purr of trams and cars, among a multitude of kiosks, roasters, shoeblacks, itinerant vendors of newspapers, fruit, flowers, toys, under a gigantic clock apparently suspended in the sky, eddy and mill and bustle the common, garish, variegated crowds. All around you is the apotheosis of electricity. It makes your head reel, for that blaze and riot of light isn't static: it flares, flows, writhes, rolls, blinks, winks, flickers, changes colour, vanishes and sparkles again before you can open your mouth to gape. The whole street is encircled with swirling, whirling, pouring, dazzling hues. Red, white, green, yellow, blue, orange, purple, they urge, solicit, press, command you to go somewhere or buy something. Bottles of beer appear on the firmament and transform themselves into dwarfs drinking; showers of gold peanuts fall from the skies; dragons breathing smoke become a film title; cigarettes are ignited; automobiles materialize. Mountains, towns, lamaseras, men with top hats, nude women with teeth, spring into existence on the façades and are wiped off into oblivion. The latest items of news gallop high up through the black air; telegrams of fire ring unseen buildings. To right and to left of you, above and below you,

the epileptic dance of letters and figures ceases not for a second; but thinking ceases, recording ceases, even feeling ceases, and, quite crazed, knowing neither what to see, nor what to do, to get, to smoke, to eat, to drink, to wear, to believe, to love, your brain spins and twirls and jumps and fades with the lights.

You cannot realize, on Broadway, that you are in America. This is the rendezvous of an international *populo*, especially on a Saturday evening—much more showily dressed than on the Paris boulevards, for instance, but *le popolo* all the same: nothing to do with the passers-by on Fifth Avenue! At every moment I meet nose to nose a racial type that comes from my own continent, or Africa, or Asia. The language you overhear isn't English either: Irish, German, Russian, Italian, Greek, Scandinavian, Jewish, all the accents, rolling, slurring, gargling, high-pitched, guttural, clipped, mangle and murder the Anglo-Saxon idiom. There is a curious note of ambiguousness, too, in the appearance of many of the women, and of furtiveness in the shapes of the men who loiter and lurk in corners, doorways and recesses, nonchalantly smoking endless cigarettes, yet somehow tense and predatory, on the look-out for something you yourself don't perceive. Broadway and its adjoining streets are riddled with dens, dives, places of assignation, the haunts of racketeers and unlawful activities; from time to time someone is shot in a gang vendetta, and you get a fleeting notion, through the revelations of the newspapers, of the secret underworld life that teems under the surface of the incandescent avenue.

But not being the police or a crime reporter, I did not investigate its hidden vices; it impressed me, an innocent stranger, only as a fabulous playground. Its boast, literally true, is that it never stops and never goes to sleep. It is entirely bent on trivialities, a perpetual fair of cheap amusements for juveniles; it displays a vivid and incoherent vulgarity, and with a noisy zest everybody in it strives to

live up to that ideal. It has neither rhyme, reason, nor sequence, but I find in it something so silly, so naïve, that it is almost touching, like an ill-bred, gaudily bedecked, irrepressible child crying gaily: "Oh, amn't I Amoosing! Do look: *how* I glitter!" I am absurdly fond of Broadway, and as I lived on Seventh Avenue, we became cronies; I liked to saunter down it at night when my work bored me, at the most preposterous hours, and buy an ice-cream which I ate standing; or a bag of chestnuts or pecans—which, however, I afterwards deposited scrupulously in a rubbish-basket, not, like the New Yorkers, those free and fearless souls, anywhere on the street. Or I halted with a maudlin grin, which I caught like an infection from all the other aimless strollers, to watch the tiny, ridiculous, mechanical puppies and babies and monkeys and birds that run and jerk and squeak and crawl on the grimy pavements. Or I tried my hand at a game of pin-ball, though I knew I shouldn't, for I thereby augmented the astronomical gains of the crime-combines. It is true one can hardly do anything in New York, from purchasing an artichoke to giving dirty linen to a laundry, without thereby augmenting the astronomical gains of the crime-combines; but that I'll tell you about in another section. Anyhow, though I'd hate to think Broadway is the apex of twentieth-century democratic civilization, that jingling tawdry bit of brilliant tinsel certainly has a lunatic, quite irresistible charm.

## § 5

Talking of things which amuse one leads me to the drug-stores, for they are as good as an entertainment. Imagine a shop where they sell, not only during the day but often during the whole night, food, drink, books, medicines, tobacco, creams, powders, perfumes, clocks, dolls, lamps, electric irons, kodaks, pessaries, higgledy-piggledy. There

is a counter, at which you sit on a high stool; it is bright, clean, painted; behind it the barmen, dressed all in white like laboratory workers, do brisk clever things with scores of shining taps, immaculate glass vessels and gleaming silver apparatus. Little blue flames under speckless pots twinkle joyously, like alembics in an alchemist's den, and from all these glistening contrivances the barmen, pressing, pulling, cutting, mixing, produce in a minute entire hot meals, a hundred different sandwiches, and every soft beverage that the ingenuity of man has wrung out of vegetables and fruits. And what do you think? The drug-stores give you with your food as much bread and butter as you wish, gratis, and after the first cup of "cawfee," as many more as you demand, free. I assure you. One day I tried it: I asked for eight cups of "cawfee." I got them all—all the eight. When I stood up to go, I felt I was drowning in my own inside, but I must admit that despite their many exasperating faults, the New Yorkers show a disposition to the grand gesture and the lavish hand. The cigarette dealers, for example, add boxes of matches to your purchase—they fling them at you, it is true, but anyhow, you get them; and the hotels, though they overcharge you shamelessly for telephone communications and meals served in your rooms, present you every morning with half a dozen packets of soap. In the South they even give you a basket of fruit on your arrival.

Coming as I did from England, where to eat is such a dolorous duty, these facilities went to my head, and I took to dropping into the drug-stores for eight or ten scrappy meals a day, till protesting stomach cramps obliged me to meditate on the New York way of feeding. From the point of view of natural produce, it is unsurpassed—America has the widest and best varieties of fish, vegetables and fruits in the world. Nowhere have I seen such a sumptuous display of *primeurs*: oranges from California, grapefruit from Florida, pineapples, bantam corn on the cob, exotic berries unknown at home—and at such ridiculously low prices that a European

can't believe his eyes. Since from its beginning this town had a cosmopolitan population, and now includes millions and millions of immigrants, every nation on earth sets its own table on Manhattan Island, and the technique of preparing food is as diverse as the whole forty-eight States and all the elements of the Melting-Pot. The New Yorkers like to eat out—most of them have no place to eat in but out!—and sometimes it seems to me that every alternate shop is a restaurant, from the great gleaming caf  s with dance music and lurid murals to the gay snack bars, the gaudy chain houses, the clattering cafeterias, the crowded lunch counters and the incredible automats where piping hot plates shoot out of slots. There are countless foreign dining-centres which offer you specialized dishes and a more or less genuine "atmosphere." German taverns, Scandinavian hunting-lodges, French surrealist galleries, Mexican peon life, serious or facetious or merely idiotic; but the cuisine patterned after the Old World is so wide-spread that almost everywhere you find side by side Chinese chow mien, Hungarian goulash, German delicatessen, Italian minestrone, Viennese pastry, Russian borch, Turkish pilaff, Norwegian herrings, Greek olives. Add to that the Boston baked beans of Massachusetts, the fried chicken of the South, Maine lobster, Mississippi okra, Michigan lentil soup, Minnesota wheatbread, Missouri apple strudel, scores and scores of other regional dishes, and you get a faint idea of the incomparable versatility of the New York cooking. Its menus are so heterogeneous that if you take the trouble to go about, for weeks on end you can eat differently every day.

The presentation of dishes is usually excellent—clams and oysters (the latter are often as large as one's hand!) boiled, creamed, fried, but especially tempting when served on a bed of sparkling ice; poultry with gaily coloured jellies and vivid crushed berries, lobsters and crabs in cock-tails, canap  s, or baked full-size, cakes, sandwiches, fancy bread wrapped in cellophane, sugar enveloped in paper.

Presentation goes beyond artistry, indeed, and approximates to that of a surgical clinic: the illusion is complete in the cafeteria, where the attendants are dressed in white overalls. There is a perpetual drive for more cleanliness, stricter regulations against chemical compounds in the food, an army of inspectors for all produce and particularly for milk, which is very meticulously graded. I am told that half the food supply daily arriving in the markets is pronounced inapt for consumption and thrown away. Certainly no European country is more advanced in public hygiene, and few are on the same level. Meals are cheap, too, besides being abundant, mixed, and wholesome: for fifty cents you obtain as much as double the price would get for you in London and Paris.

"Is there no snag?" you ask suspiciously, for all this seems too good to be unreservedly true. Yes, there is several, though the criticisms that follow apply to public resorts and not to home-cooking. The drug-stores, the cafeterias and the automats quickly make you irregular in your habits. Since you can be served at any moment, you eat at all moments. The dishes simmer for hours, so as to be ready as soon as they are called for, and their original juiciness is rapidly steamed out. After you have disposed of a course, you jump up to fetch yourself a new one, a procedure which militates against the tranquillity proper to digestion: and if you do not jump up, but collect everything at once, from your soup to your coffee, the meal on your tray turns stone-cold long before you have finished. Though it is amusing to find yourself surrounded by every class and type of people, by the man-in-the-street, policeman, truck-driver, hotel bell-boy, typist, commercial traveller, clerk, student, Chinaman, Negro, business woman, there is no repose; you are deafened by the clatter and rattle, you are pushed and collided into, the men wear their hats, the waitresses don't care a damn what you choose and serve out the helpings with superciliousness and stinginess—what blasphemy, to hire women,

so ignorant and careless of food, so preoccupied with their little flirtations with clients, in restaurants!—and the attendants sweep up the dust and fallen scraps under your nose. You can consider yourself lucky when they don't drench their mops in strong disinfectants. The use of canned produce is monstrously prevalent and cries aloud to the Lord for vengeance—and this iniquitous practice is doubly illogical, first because the natural materials are so plentiful and superb, and next because there exists such a loud and universal obsession with vitamins. Another horrible, *horrible*, mania is for freezing. Now if refrigerators preserve food from decaying, they also render it almost totally insipid. The result is that to make it tasteful, it has to be smothered in sauces, condiments, all sorts of violent and incompatible ingredients, which flavour it vaguely, but destroy the palate utterly and for ever. I still swoon with indignation when I am presented with oysters drowned in chili, oranges and pineapples covered with factory-made mayonnaise, unholy salads in which cheese and fruits are smeared with a ubiquitous white liquid masquerading as cream. As to the gravy, it creeps in everywhere, like Satan: it soaks perfect toast and submerges tender turkey and chicken and floods fresh meat. Nothing retains any longer its distinctive taste or entire nutritive value. Also, Americans are given to smoking between courses, and how they can perceive delicate or subtle savours when their mouths are full of the fumes of burning paper and tobacco, I'm sure I don't know. And the lack of leisure—quite unnecessary, but an invincible delusion—is such that they stand instead of sitting, gulp instead of masticating, and instead of conversing emit jarring staccato sounds. All these table customs tend to the loss of sensory discernment; I don't believe New Yorkers enjoy their food, and that, in a continent which overwhelms them with the gifts of the most lavish of soils!

As an enormous number of people all over America don't cook in their houses, such impieties play, alas, the rôle of



gastronomical educators. I find that lone women and working-class housewives also show the same hasty and casual attitude towards food, and the classic reproach that the can-opener is their principle achievement is far from being undeserved. In the bourgeoisie, however, culinary art and respect are infinitely greater, and a good American dinner is a completely unforgettable thing. In New England homes and in the South I have been treated to meals which almost persuaded me that in spite of the dictators and their countries, Man is no longer a savage; they rose to matchless heights in New Orleans, where people study food. And to conclude this section, let me say that although the culinary perversions of America are still too numerous and totally unjustifiable, it must always be remembered, even as the Americans proclaim, that she did bestow ice water and orange juice upon an unenlightened world, and for those two inventions, if for nothing else, deserves to be dubbed Blessed among the nations.

## § 6

*Men, Women, General Traits of the Population, Entertainments.*  
Now I am going to generalize. Yes, yes, I know I shall be solemnly warned against the dangers of generalizations -- and how I wish that the asses who always solemnly warn me against the dangers of generalizations would go and eat thistles instead of giving me advice! I am as well aware as they that in a town of nearly eight million inhabitants there are innumerable exceptions. Of course individuals and groups exist that stand away from the current, evolve and attain a very distinctive aim. But when, after a period of several months, you find that the majority of the people you've met--and in a place like New York, which contains an infinitude of different circles, all very fluid, very accessible, that pass you on instantly one to the other, you meet

more people in a few weeks than in two years in London or five years in Paris--display at least on some points similar features and characteristics and tell you the same things, you are entitled to speak of general trends and habits. At the very beginning of my stay I was struck by certain peculiarities, which I had seen nowhere else, and at the end of my stay they were still my predominant impressions. That being the case, I shall generalize about the New Yorkers without any compunction.

If you are a foreigner, the moment you arrive in New York you are asked what you think of the "American Woman." It is a question which is *de rigueur*, and one of the most foolish imaginable, first, because you are cross-examined about her before you have had time to observe her, and secondly because she varies greatly according to the regions of the United States: a Southerner, for instance, being distinctly not like a New Englander or a Middle-Westerner, neither physically, nor in her social and philosophical outlook on life. What is true, however, is that New York has produced a type of woman, as specific as, say, the *Parisienne* (who is also not representative of the French provincial woman or the countrywoman), and that it is so sharply-cut and highly coloured that it attracts a disproportionate amount of attention. Moreover, as most Europeans never travel further than New York, they rarely meet any other types.

Naturally enough, you first see the New York women *en masse* in the streets and shops and restaurants. It did not take me long to come to an opinion. I communicated it to Philip, whose reactions are not so prompt. I said: "Goodness! Look at them! They have all stepped straight out of the latest number of *Vogue*."

They had. They were scented, powdered, rouged and eyebrow-plucked; their hair was marcelled, their finger-nails were scarlet-lacquered; they walked easily, with poise and grace, showing slender wrists and ankles and nicely-shod feet. They wore the most fashionable dresses, the most

modern shades of colours, the most recent inventions in hats, scarves, bags, jewellery, collars. Their clothes fitted like sheaths, and their trinkets and accessories, both smart and appropriate, finished the scheme. When they were young, they had round very pretty baby faces, with rather peevish mouths, rectangular bodies with architectural lines, thin square shoulders, a long fall from neck to ankle, no breasts, no hips, no belly, no buttocks: they resembled their own skyscrapers. When they were old, they were either a more time-worn edition of the young, or had deep curving sliding bosoms that made up in authority for what they had lost in slimness. They weren't the last word, but the last letter of the last word in novel styles. I was so dazzled, I couldn't discover any exception, and thought it was all prodigious.

I went on thinking it was prodigious after I had begun to roam through the city, and gazed at the crowds in the parks, especially on Sunday afternoons, and the young generation in the poor quarters. The quality of the frock materials, of course, was much shoddier, and the make rougher, but at a distance, the working-girls looked in almost every detail like their Fifth and Park Avenue sisters. They too were "waved" and manicured, decked out in the hues and shapes of the moment. The gadgets were similar, and the effect of trimness and daintiness was the same. Their whole outfit displayed care and taste. I do not know of any other city where the women make the best of themselves with such indomitable resolution. In Paris, for example, where they are well-dressed, too, there are still class-types; you can distinguish the woman of the people, the woman in business, and the woman of leisure; but in New York you cannot tell the difference, they are all *soigné* and excellently groomed. I can't understand how the working-classes manage it: they must put every cent they earn on their backs, and so must the young men who, their day's job over in shops, hotels, drug-stores, emerge into the street as neatly turned-out as *des fils de famille*. But anyway, rich or poor, bees or drones,

the women succeed in presenting an unflinchingly gallant appearance to the world, and heighten enormously the impression of widespread prosperity which is one of the chief amaze-ments of the newly-arrived foreigner.

Glad though one is to see so many people extraordinarily well-attired, I have a criticism to make. Little by little, this unflinchingly gallant appearance of the New York woman becomes fatiguing to the spectator. It is very brave of her to fight so hard to be handsome and smart and retain sex-appeal, but she pushes the fight to extremes. There is a sense of strain. The energy spent on keeping oneself up to such a mark is aggressive. No relaxation, no softness, no plainness, no wrinkles, hardly any signs of age are allowed their normal way. It is almost as if there were a despair at the back of all this strenuousness—the belief that if you let up for a moment, you'll be submerged. Can't an American woman, you ask yourself at last, puzzled, attract an American man if she is just natural? Must there be so inflexible and chinkless an armour of paint and fashion and artificial freshness and elegance? To me, who need to relapse from time to time into downright sloppiness and frumpiness, the thought of the unending battle the New York woman wages to remain seductive, is purely terrifying.

Besides, this determination to be in the swim at all costs leads to an excessive standardization. The New York women make you feel that they are just another form of mass production. The herd instinct of imitation is so developed that it ousts individuality. They seem to have been manufactured *en série*, in their hundreds of thousands, by a tremendously clever, efficient, but deadening plant. Nobody dreams of choosing what suits her, if the ensemble means that she would be behind the times. She ignores her own type: she must belong to the prevalent type. The objective is to be as good as everyone else, but in the manner of everyone else, and originality is lost in this obstinate endeavour. You do not catch a glimpse of that eccentricity which is the real affirma-

tion of oneself. The facial expression, too, which most young women try to cultivate, appears to be that of the successful movie actress, and as in America the successful movie actress is unfathomably vapid, the result of this obsession is too often a deliberately and desolatingly banal countenance. The gestures, the vocabulary, the outlook, are stereotyped, so fierce is the resolution to copy the model as closely as one can; in this unprecedentedly mixed population, which should produce innumerable various kinds of mentality as well as of physiognomy, the lack of fundamental diversity is startling.

As time went on, I came to know a great many New York women: working-women, professional women, business women, "socialites" (which means, women of society—what hideous names the Press invents in America!). Whatever circle they belonged to, their principal characteristics seemed to me to be self-assurance, ambition and competence. Many things conspire to give a woman a superiority complex—the trend of education, both at home and at school, the conventional attitude of the men, democratic principles, the vote, the spirit of the country—so she starts with a formidable dose of self-reliance. Since she is convinced of her ability, there is no reason why she shouldn't aspire to the highest prizes for ability that life holds in store, and Lordy! how she strikes out to get them! The goal takes different forms, but the animating motive is always the desire to better her lot, whether by marriage or by personal efforts. There is no resignation in the make-up of the New York woman. She will not stay in one invariable niche any more than the social classes will stay in invariable compartments. I can think of no one less likely to follow the command given to her sex by Adolf Hitler: "Stay at home; take pot and pan; then you'll be sure to get a man." Her self-assurance and her ambition are usually backed by her efficiency, for it is unquestionable that the American woman in general and the New Yorker in particular is exceedingly enterprising,

resourceful, and capable in practical matters. Her technical work is good - it has to be good, for there is torrential competition and little sentimentality in New York business, and she would speedily be fired if she did not fulfil high requirements. She is quick, clean, and astonishingly nimble with her hands in everything that has to do with her kitchen, her house, her personal effects, which are admirably neat. I like her fastidious habit of washing her stockings, knickers and brassière every night, as naturally as she brushes her hair and her teeth. I realized in America the truth of what the French *couturières* say, that of all their foreign customers the American woman is physically the daintiest - just as the Englishwoman is the most sluttish. Optimistic, she is always expecting a "break"; plucky, when it doesn't come she carries on with hardness but nary a whine. Not for her introspection, self-analysis, the limping of the soul among the rocks of doubt. She may have depths, but if so, she shows no signs of going down into them to find nothing, and deeper again, lust, and still more deeply, vanity. Like a life-belt her pride, crude, short-sighted and strong, keeps her floating on the surfaces. To those who are in search of lessons in energy, resiliency, cheerfulness, hopefulness and an unassailable conceit, I could not recommend a better teacher.

From the point of view of the fervent feminist, I think she is singularly inspiring, for she is the most convincing proof that women can stand upright on their feet and forge by their undismayed endeavours a worth-while life of their own - and that old age and defeat are solely a state of mind. She triumphantly puts to naught the still prevalent belief of the European that economically it is impossible to get anywhere without the counsel and support of a man, and that in sheer decency a woman's activities must stop when she has reached a specified number of years. As a woman, I admire her sense of solidarity, her fellowship for other women, for she is in general an excellent comrade, helpful and disinterested,

and loyal in team-work. Her friendship is apt to be a reality, not merely a name; it stands the test of reverses of fortune much more steadfastly than in England, and infinitely more than in France (or in any Latin country, at that; for Latins have no gift at all for friendship). And finally, as an individual, I am more grateful to her than I can say. Never, anywhere, did I receive anything like the welcome she gave me. Please don't exclaim that she was generous because she is a lion-hunter. Undoubtedly there is a great deal of nauseatingly idiotic and sensational lion-hunting in certain social and literary circles in New York: a lack of breeding, too, makes it objectionably persistent. But in my case this propensity had no play. I am not a lion. The majority of my works are written in French, and no book of mine had been published in America when I came over. Not only am I not rich, but I am rigidly economical, French, Dutch and Huguenot strains combining to tie my purse-strings into inextricable knots. So I threw no parties. There was neither snobbish kudos nor material benefit to be derived from my acquaintance. Yet I met with a cordiality which stupefied me, it was so genuine and so enduring. And it was so considerate. The hospitality of the New York woman is proverbial—and rightly so, but a trait to which we do not pay sufficient homage is her courtesy and solicitude as a hostess. She takes the utmost pains to set her guests at ease, introduce them to each other, establish the contacts and start the conversations they require. It is a pity that London hostesses, so scandalously casual and so often deliberately rude, and even Paris hostesses, who have begun to be infected by English bad manners, do not learn from her how to entertain.

It is an even greater pity that she is so munificent towards European visitors. Of all pretentious, arrogant and thankless spongers, they are the princes. They grab all they can, free board, free meals, money, social connections; they profit avidly by the indiscriminating American lavishness,

and on returning to Europe—they who in their own country would not dream of offering a fried potato to a foreigner unless it meant some sort of gain—they assume the odious pose of ridiculing the very disposition by which they acquired, in America, an importance they can achieve nowhere else. The complaint of these insufferable nonentities, inflated by the attention America alone is misguided enough to accord them, is that they were all drenched, swamped, drowned and victimized by the too-too-terrible-my-dear American hospitality. In this connection, also, it is deplorable that a class of idle leisured New York women, largely middle-aged (so they ought to know better), should encourage, by the maudlin enthusiasm with which they rush in droves to “lectures,” the fatuousness and cupidity of the shckel-seekers who blow in from the other side. No, you needn’t murmur “Sour grapes. . . .” I had plenty of offers for lectures, and I did not accept them, for I consider that we drench the Americans quite enough with platitudes as it is.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of my liking for the New York woman, however, I cannot shut my eyes to faults which are repelling. Her enormous self-confidence goes hand in hand with an unshakable vanity—in fact, the self-confidence is born of vanity—and its manifestations are much too authoritative for my taste. She lays down the law so decisively and perpetually, there is so little mystery and subtlety in her sustained trenchancy, that she is the most obvious thing alive—and so she quickly becomes wearisome. Partly it is the perpetual competition which puts her so harshly on the defensive, for it is a mistake to think that in the world of affairs the American male shows her any gallantry. Quite on the contrary: if he is almost cringingly subservient to the womenfolk of his own family and social milieu, he is prone to be singularly

<sup>1</sup> The most detestable cadgers of all are the English—the men especially. The majority of young Englishmen strike me, a Continental, as being out-and-out parasites. They live on their hosts—in Europe, too—till they have to be turned out.



brutal towards women in purely business relationships. Partly it is the tempo of life in New York which precludes consecutive thinking. What with the competition and the precipitation, some source of original reflection, some fount of profound emotion, runs dry in the average New York woman. I know Americans have the Anglo-Saxon reluctance to speak of spiritual experiences (except when they happen to be the disciples of one of those Messiahs America is always throwing up: Mrs. Eddy, Aimée Semple MacPherson, Father Divine, Frank Buchman -- and then, oh gods! how everlastingly they'll talk!) as well as the Anglo-Saxon inability to acquire a vocabulary comprising more than a hundred or so words, but here I do not feel that the barrier is either *pudeur* or poverty of speech. The vital forces of people transmute things in different ways; the American way is so immediate, so unspeculative, that it is unilluminating. Shrewd and factual knowledge, vivacious conversation, humour, you get in abundance—from both sexes; but that understanding of mainsprings which after all is the essence of any personal or universal philosophy, is not a characteristic of the American mind.

The New York woman has a reputation, foisted upon her not only by foreigners, but by her own countrymen, of being hard and egotistic in sexual relationships. She is freely called a gold-digger and a finale-hopper, that is, something of a cheat. As I am not a man, I do not know how far these accusations are true. My impression is that her devotion has definite and quickly-reached limits, and that her instinct is to get more than she gives, if the giving implies danger or much inconvenience. Also, that she suffers from discontent and hunger, both emotional and physical: sex frustration. I hate using these Freudian terms, to which Americans are so addicted that they trot them out on every occasion, with only the vaguest notion of what they mean—but there really is here a sort of neurosis, apparent in a tendency to restlessness, neurasthenia, breakdowns, at which the European

wonders, they seem so unjustified by her exterior conditions. Is it that the preoccupation with her own rights and objectives renders her incapable of spiritual submission, and so decreases tenderness, intimacy, the possibility of fusion, leaving her unsatisfied; or is it that the average American man is so awkward, so drearily immersed in utilitarian work, so unstimulating psychologically, so prone to put an emphasis exclusively on mere youth and looks, that he starves her? Both, I suppose.

She labours, too, under a peculiar handicap. Beneath her toughness and competence, there is the extravagant Anglo-Saxon layer of sentimentality, aggravated by the diet of mawkish love stories with which an incredibly foolish popular literature supplies her. She is the constant target of hectic and clamorous advertisements based on sex-appeal, for publicity in the United States invariably takes a sexual twist, and it is wonderful to see how every article a manufacturer boosts, even if it be as remote from her ordinary activities as a telescope, is presented to her as having been designed solely for the furtherance of her beauty, health, wealth and happiness. These insidious or massive suggestions amplify her unconscious, and to my Latin mind, inordinate, yearning for sheer sentimentality, and it is very ironical that fate should mark her out for marriage to so notoriously poor a sexual and intellectual companion as the typical American. The best provider in the world, he is the most uninteresting and uninterested, the most insensitive mate imaginable. Well, whatever the causes of her frustration, the result is that she does feel cheated, and consequently she is always *chasing*. And chasing with a blatancy, a lack of finesse that is positively painful to witness. Her pursuit of men is shockingly evident—only in England did I see the same raw methods. I am not speaking, of course, of “professionals,” but of the middle classes and the working classes. Nor do I intend to say that the average European woman does without men, but in Latin countries at least her tactics

are infinitely more subtle. She conceals her desires much more dexterously, though the aim, and end, are the same. Just think of the American habit of collecting "boy friends." You may argue that it is due to an excessively vulgar conception of social success: the more men you have round you, ringing you up, taking you out, giving you candy and small presents, the more popular you are held to be. If you have few boy friends, you are considered a failure. But what does this lead to? An insatiable quest for admirers, with the disappointments and heart-burnings it entails; promiscuousness and superficiality in emotion—on Monday you have Harry, on Tuesday Bill, on Wednesday Sam, on Thursday Tom, and so on; and with each of them, on their appointed "date," you presumably go through the same gestures and sensations—and an undignified, a horrible dependence on external and unstable props to prove your value to yourself and others. It is one of the paradoxes of American civilization that the women should be so self-reliant, and yet need so devastatingly—even, so shamefully—to be bolstered up from the outside.

Failing men, there must be society and excitements. It appears organically impossible for a New York woman to remain alone, to pass an evening quietly in her room, *en tête-à-tête* with herself or a book. She just can't do it: solitude awakens in her terror or mortification, the childish conviction that she has fallen out of things and is defeated. How often have I been rung up by acquaintances in New York, to be asked what I was "doing that evening." "Nothing!" I would answer in a burst of thankfulness. "I'm staying at home." "Nothing!" would come the horror-stricken reply. "Why, say, that's just too terrible! Why, listen, you can't do that!" And immediately a deluge of suggestions would be poured over me: a dinner, a dance, a cinema, a theatre, a party, a meeting somewhere, anywhere, so that I should be saved from the utter desolation and the abominable humiliation of a few hours spent with my own body and brain. This

was all prompted by the sincerest kindness, but what a commentary on the tragic incapacity to find sustenance in oneself, to break away from the poisonous standards and customs of a gregariousness that has degenerated into the loss of any inner life! You see other effects of the same cause in the mass gatherings of women for bridge, luncheons, teas; in the unprecedented number of women's clubs—I grant you they are a marvel of comfort and convenience, but if you care for privacy, you'll have about as much of it as an animal on parade in a zoo; in the headlong canter for "culture," philosophies, creeds, explanations, instructions, ideals, which the New Yorkers crave to have administered to them, like capsules, in those eternal, half-baked, deadly lectures on politics, economics, ethics, religion, literature, art, science, how to make friends, how to charm, how to enjoy, how to wake up and live, how to live alone and like it—on everything under the sun, as if psychology and wisdom and personality could be obtained by swallowing at one gulp brief, cheap, ready-made rules! Incidentally, this crazy and lazy love of galloping off to tenth-rate lectures for mental nourishment is a general American trait, though it reaches the zenith of epilepsy in New York.

All in all, I do not think that the American woman is a conspicuous success from the angle of human growth and happiness, nor that she handles at all properly her unsurpassable advantages, chances, and gifts, nor that she derives anything like the benefit she could from her fortunate material conditions. I frankly envy her privileges, but the type of being which has been evolved from them, probably too rapidly, has as yet no outstanding value, and I believe there would be a catastrophical loss of spiritual reality in the world if it prevailed.

It is curious that to give an idea of a metropolis one should have to evoke the predominant traits of its inhabitants rather than a figure of the place itself. Usually, when I think of a capital city in Europe, I feel that it is an individuality,

and I see a face. But I cannot do that in the case of New York, for it is not an entity. Often it has seemed to me that there is no New York, in the sense that there is a Paris, a London, a Rome, a Prague. There are a hundred worlds in New York, the worlds of politics, of government, of banking, of big business, of a social oligarchy, of literature, music, painting and the theatre, of the Jews, of the Negroes, of the foreigners representing every land and race and sect, of a pseudo-Bohemia. They make for a huge population and an infinity of interests, but not for a spiritual heritage. There is no spiritual continuity in New York. Impersonal and featureless as electricity, it is, like electricity, a source of incalculable and tremendously diverse power. Beyond that, I cannot tell what it stands for. That is why, to describe it, I have to fall back upon its manifestations: the general temper and trends of its people. If it has a coherent and permanent significance, all I can say is that I have missed it wholly.

Of all the habits of the New York population, the one that smites you (literally) first, is the habit of rushing. Why the New Yorkers rush, where and to what they rush, is not so easy to discern. When you ask them, they do not explain their rushing with impeccable lucidity. They say it is the pace of New York; competition; necessity. They seem eager to impress upon you a sense of the fatality of the New York pace, the New York competition, the New York necessity. To hear them, one would imagine that New York is a living diabolical monster that has laid a curse upon them: either they rush, or it chaws them up in its horrid baleful jaws. This belief of the New Yorkers in the peculiar malevolence of their city is so ingrained, so vivid, so universal, that it affects you too. You mourn for this innocent people so cruelly doomed to rush on and on and on, without reason and without end, or to be devoured in an excessively disagreeable manner. But after a while, when the rush—to which you began by yielding since you were assured that it was your destiny—sets your head spinning and exacerbates

your nerves, you reflect that though you have some knowledge of most of the great cities of the earth, none of them was a diabolical monster that condemned you to a senseless rushing under pain of munching you up alive. By what unprecedented bio-chemical process, you wonder, did an agglomeration of lumps of stone and concrete and a network of streets convert themselves into an inescapable ogre martyring intelligent human beings? It is so puzzling, you feel bound to investigate the problem.

The initial idea is, of course, the universal American conviction that the aim and end of life is to Act. The New Yorkers having the monkey-like tendency to exaggerate, travestied the conviction, thus producing an illusion of super-activity. It is very funny to observe how this rushing has become a *mise-en-scène*, a sort of theatrical prop. They do it mechanically. A business man who goes out of his room to drink a glass of water will stand in front of the cooler clutching a sheaf of papers in his hand. He can't attend to them, naturally, but still, the gesture gives the impression that he's in the orthodox New York tradition of a tearing, raging, convulsive hurry. In the big offices, where the clerks are hemmed in by pens—an arrangement which reminds you of cattle—each desk sports a house telephone, so that every second of the inestimably precious New York time should be husbanded. It would take too long to walk round the partitions: the pressure, the implacable pressure, is so great. But though the clerks do start telephoning over the partitions, they find it more convenient to continue the conversation by simple speaking, and you have the bizarre spectacle of men, holding receivers riveted to their ears, and talking directly across to one another! You pay a visit to an Important Personage. Lord! What urgings to hustle! He'll rush forward to meet you, he'll rush back to escort you; he whirls you along by the elbow; not a minute to spare, no, not the fraction of a minute, the exactions of the New York pace are so inexorable—surely you understand.

Then you reach his office, and what do you think you do? You sit down for an hour to cigarettes and a perfectly irrelevant and superfluous chat. Rather than take a local train on the Subway, the New Yorker will risk breaking his neck to catch an express. Then he'll spend a quarter of an hour waiting for a connection, again by express, while the locals go by every few minutes and get to his destination before him. But that is beside the point: the point is that the express, while it runs, runs faster, and so procures him the satisfaction of a proper, frantic, and completely stupid rush. That all this rush in one's work, one's meals, one's social relationships achieves thoughtlessness, dyspepsia and bad manners, and in no wise, nor in anything, gets anybody any forrader, never dawns on the New Yorkers' maniacally obsessed minds.

The New Yorkers are greedy. I do not only mean by that that they talk commerce preponderantly and swampingly, that there is no refuge from it, that every issue leads up to it, that every value is coloured by it. Heaven knows that the French and the Italians and the Swiss and the Dutch are also indefatigable in their pursuit of money! But the New Yorkers seem to me immensely more *acquisitive* than most people: acquisitive to the exclusion of any other objectives. You see, this population is not indigenous. Only a handful of its inhabitants come from original old New York families. The enormous majority arrive in New York from all over Europe, where they were poor, abased, oppressed, and from all parts of the United States, where they were dissatisfied. Their purpose is to become more prosperous. From the very start, therefore, New York is to them an object to be exploited. They flock to it, not to give to it, to honour it, to learn from it, but primarily to *get* from it: to get money, gifts, scholarships, endowments, reputation—*prizes*. They know nothing about it, they do not care for it, they do not feel it is theirs. It is just a thing to be looted. And because of that, it is the most unloved city in the world.

For the same reason, it is a particularly unscrupulous city. All the newcomers need expression, but owing to the psychological and economic circumstances which compel them to abandon their own places, the form that their need takes is warped from the outset, and manifests itself immediately as a desire for possessions. New York does not represent a town where you are content merely to make a living; it is a town where you snatch, according to your abilities, as much as possible from somebody or something. Competition is informed by an unparalleled intensity and dishonesty, not only in business, but in the liberal professions as well. For whereas (in Europe at least) the liberal professions are already a proof of a certain culture, and thereby afford to their members the protection of a specific class—from which you are still ousted when guilty of reprehensible conduct—in New York, thanks to the absence of basic classes, the cultured and the uncultured compete for the same spoils, entirely unchecked by tradition or social discipline, and so the level, from a mental and ethical point of view, is frequently lamentably low. The same thing applies to politics, where there is neither philosophy nor training, with even more evil results. The incentive being acquisitiveness, the accepted standard being possessions, it is logical that business, professions and politics should be regarded as things to be traded. Traded they are, and no mistake about it. It cannot be denied that in almost all activities the temper is one of a pitiless commercialism, a savage rapacity, and an utterly unscrupulous advertising. New York is peerless in that respect. There are honourable individuals and groups that fight the trend and escape from it, but in general this brutal and devouring spirit bears upon everything man produces in New York, whether it be of his soul, his intellect, or his hands, so as to make of it a marketable commodity—and the thunderous injunction that arises from America's metropolis is, not to think or to feel, but at all costs to *grab*.

Restless and greedy, the New Yorkers are also, to my mind,



an unbalanced and dislocated population. I put down the cause of the unbalance to the physical confinement the city inflicts. Except in the big towns of China, nowhere else on earth do so many people live so close together. The atmosphere and the environment are so artificial that childhood is premature, the youngsters over-developing in every way, precocious, strident, and highly-strung. The same constriction makes for frustrations and repressions in adults: there is no space. The distances are too great; time is lacking. Trammelled, harassed, interrupted, these preoccupied creatures cannot indulge in leisured love, sustained human contacts, friendship, mutual trust or even neighbourliness. Competition is rendered so fierce both by the formidable overcrowding and the acquisitive disposition that it obliterates faith and kindliness. If you don't kill, you'll get killed; if you rise, it can but be on the carcasses of the others. Under the terrific pressure, the ethics and the mechanics of life go awry, and a nervous excitation takes the place of a rational activity. This is the city of sudden gigantic enthusiasms and equally sudden gigantic flops, violent spurts and relapses, hysterical fireworks of energy and noise and immense prostrations, frenzied championships and massive betrayals. The people are not *solid*. They forget, they neglect, they shift and change, they flare up for a second and subside in ashes. You cannot rely on their moods or their actions. No common discipline, no common tradition, no common devotion, no common spiritual heritage, hold them together.

How could it be otherwise when, as I have pointed out already, there is not even the nucleus of a common stock? Everywhere disruption reigns. Relatively very few people in New York have a secure home. The children of the European immigrants break away as soon as they can from the old parents, and the scission is often very cruel, so desperate is their wish not to be identified, in this new and different country whose advantages must be exploited for all they are worth, with the unfavourable origins of their relatives. Of

the genuine Americans a high percentage derives from other States: their families stay in the home-towns, and the adventurers shift for themselves in New York. Everyone plays for his own hand. The town does not know itself. Its atmosphere is not the atmosphere of a community, stable and interlocking, with a definite and enveloping orientation, but of individuals who are isolated, dwelling in hotel rooms or clubs, eating in restaurants and drug-stores, congregating in dance-halls, roof-gardens and bars, being ill and giving birth in hospitals, and whisked off to a "mortician's parlour" or a "funeral home" for burial. Living alone, concentrating on their own aim, which is to "get there," there is little opportunity for the niceties and amenities, the reciprocal consideration which social intercourse imposes, and even less for the prolonged exchange of ideas. Though the last thing the New Yorkers can be accused of is a lack of alert and acute intelligence, the turn their mind takes is a peculiar kind of unthinkingness. Like agile and futile little birds pecking at worms, in too much of a hustle and bustle even to gobble them up, they peck at ideas and hop away. They skim over the surfaces of problems like water-boatmen over a pond. They'll resort to any dodge to avoid exercising their brain, and oblige you to badger and pummel and batter them with questions, and drive them into a corner from which they can't escape, before they will turn to and give you a thoughtful explanation of things. Then it is apt to be remarkably shrewd and quite startlingly frank. But to get them to link up effects with causes, weave facts into a comprehensive picture and build up a synthesis, is a gruelling job, and I found it more tiring and difficult to extract good talk from them than from equivalent circles in many lesser cities.

Rush, competition, dislocation, isolation, are, I suppose, the cause of yet another distinctive trait of the New Yorkers: their mannerlessness. A more uncouth population surely cannot exist. They are bone-rude. The telephone operator cuts you off before you've said three words; the shop-girl

tosses away your demands as soon as she judges them to be troublesome; the waiters sweep up their tip without a "thank you"; service in the hotels is as impersonal and perfunctory as a robot's—only the Negroes look pleasant—and the managers at the reception desks are as cordial as tombstones. I've said that the bus conductors snarl at you, the thick truculent policemen growl, the janitors snap, the commissionaires are as gruff as navvies. Behind the counter the barman, from whom you inquire politely if you can have a glass of orange juice, grumbles: "S'pose so," and shows you his back. They are all so glum, too: they never smile. Go up to a passer-by and ask for directions, and the resentful start he'll give throws you off your own balance. They seem to become afraid of some mysterious frame-up, if you speak to them urbanely. Never say "please," or "excuse me" in New York; they jib at it instinctively; there is a stare of speculation as to your motives when you address them as if they were civilized human beings. No, I'm not being spiteful, they really are like that. I was so disconcerted at first that I believed I had suddenly developed some physically objectionable characteristic, and I would walk endlessly, from one block to the other, in the wrong direction naturally, brooding over my inexplicable disgrace. Then I revolted, for my common sense told me I couldn't have changed drastically from what I had been only a few weeks ago in London, where everybody, *everybody* except one single tax-collector, beamed upon me adorably when I appealed to them for help. So I tried another method. I pounced upon the New Yorkers with a pugnacious scowl, and at the top of my voice bawled out: "Say, listen, where the hell is Fifty-fifth Street? Hey! What? Stop chewing (or smoking, or grimacing, or muttering, or whatever it was they were doing; they're always doing something) and spit it out, you dope!" That language they understood immediately, and I got about with facility. Talking of language, I can't think what their excellent public schools are up to;

the way the New Yorkers massacre English is enough to lacerate even a foreigner's ear. They have no grammar, they slur and clip and distort their words, they reel off everlastingly slogans and catchwords and saws and formulæ instead of seeking their own expressions, and they indulge in a maddening trick of punctuating whatever you say by an atrocious grunting *hm'hm*. I don't want to appear unduly cantankerous, but the truth is the truth and must be proclaimed; outside relations in social groups, the New Yorker behaves as if he were a particularly surly bear in a pit of particularly bad-tempered beasts. And that's that.

My final grievance against New York is that it has achieved a brand of vulgarity which no other great city, American or European or Asiatic or African (I haven't been to Australia yet), has ever produced. The standards of taste are inconceivably unfastidious, owing to the low origin of the majority of the people, to the free mixing, to the lack of those criteria which in the older democracies were elaborated by the traditionally superior social classes and copied by the inferior ones, and to the fact that pleasures are not chosen or evolved by personal inclination or by culture, but are manufactured, turned out ready-made, and can be bought cheap. Besides, the passionate craving to make money leads, in this ingenious people, to every imaginable sort of stunt. There is a public exploitation and capitalization of foibles, sentimentalities, ambitions and lunacies, which is unsurpassed. Publicity has turned into sheer exhibitionism, and everything and everybody helps on the good work: stores, advertisers, the press, the radio, literature, art, officialdom, especially the municipalities, which—save for the present one, that of Mayor La Guardia—are notorious for the silliness and commonness of their “city-welcomes,” in which, of course, the population participates. Whoever hasn't seen the New Yorkers turn out in their millions to give a reception to someone who has caught their volatile fancy, often someone who has performed a totally unimportant trick, screaming,

hooting, dementedly tearing and scattering paper, has no idea of the depths of idiocy and vulgarity into which the masses of a democracy can plunge. Read *Mrs. Astor's Horse* if you want to get an inkling of what New York can do in the way of craziness.

Nothing new can be said about entertainments in any huge modern city. They all resemble each other. In New York there are infinitely more of them, on a bigger and richer scale, and in larger buildings. I didn't discern any other difference. I went to the theatres, which are horribly dear, and thought that some plays were vital and vigorous and original, that some were trashy or imbecile, and that the actors, except for half a dozen or so, had an incredibly simple and untutored technique, registering emotion by the most obvious means. Particularly do they not understand the use and value of silence. They oscillate between too much noise and too much sentimentality in their tones. New York is under the impression that its theatre is unsurpassably creative and fresh, but as usual its opinion of its own achievements is too flattering. I walked out of its shows, before they ended, just as often as I do in Paris and in London. To be fair, however, I must add that I do not like the theatre anywhere. I always feel that I would have written the plot in another fashion, and played the parts in another way, and when you are urgently tempted to cry out: "Oh, how foolish!" and "Not like that, you duffer, you're spoiling it!" all possibility of pleasure evaporates. Just now, some short plays, chiefly on social subjects, are being produced by unemployed actors to whom the Government pays relief; it is a very interesting enterprise and though the acting is no great shakes, it is energetic and sincere, and as your seat only costs fifty cents, you don't feel bilked, as you do in the regular theatres, when the piece turns out to be a dud.

As for music, there are a few American composers of much charm, but New York still imports its best performances from Europe, bag and baggage: I mean, the work, the

principal artists and the conductors. At this time of day, it is superfluous to comment on jazz, negro spirituals, the "blues," and swing music; the radio has made them familiar to all of us, and in any case I don't think they are worth a deep analysis: according to your mood, they seem charged with your own sorrows, or just an unintelligible and insufferable yowl. The cinema: well, that's Hollywood—that is, in my opinion, frequently magnificent photography, ninety-eight per cent of the shows impeccably moronic, and ninety-nine and a fraction per cent of the American stars cancers on the face of Art (if you can imagine Art with a face). Anyhow, the thing they are best fitted for is the interior of a sack, well weighted with stones and flung into the Pacific—and that's disposing of them with great leniency.

There are innumerable places where you play indescribably childish mechanized games (all crooked); night-clubs, some scandalous, some only boring; dance-halls, some macabrely dull, some so indecent that I do not believe any other city authorities would tolerate them publicly. There you see "hostesses" dressed like little girls in knee-short frocks, with flaring bows in their hair and those baby-faces (rigged up, of course) so dear to the American male, waiting on a floor surrounded by a barricade. The spectators stand behind the barricade, and may watch. But if they pay a few cents, they pass through the barricade, and may feel, for then they become clients and a hostess manoeuvres them through a dance. You can guess what the manoeuvring consists of. *Il n'y a rien pour l'homme, rien pour la femme: tout est pour la blanchisserie.* I cannot understand why the American goes abroad in search of vice: he has every brand of lewdness served up to him with the utmost munificence in New York. I got to the metropolis just in time to see the last "Burlesks" and their strip-tease acts, which have now been suppressed. I can hardly call myself squeamish, but the obscenity of those convulsive ultimate black-and-red flaps between naked thighs and those public masturbations, the tumultuous ap-

plause they elicited, taught me something entirely new about bestiality. "We saw things that were worse in Paris," said sinisterly, American friends when I made these observations. "We were served by waitresses stripped to the skin." No doubt. Paris went foully and mercenarily erotic after the War, pandering to the insistent demands of rich foreigners for debauchery, but the point is that this kind of entertainment was clandestine and its price so prohibitive that relatively only a few wealthy coprophagists could afford it. The Burlesks in New York were licensed, open to everybody and quite cheap. Well, enough of this unsavoury subject; I mentioned it mainly because time and again I was irritated by the unpardonably naive American assumption that the French, one of the sanest, most contentedly bourgeois and traditional people in the world, where divorces are fewer, stable marriages more numerous, and family life more united than in perhaps any other advanced nation, are primarily inventors and purveyors of vice.

I was bowled over by the New York museums. It was not so much their contents that dazzled me, for though the latter are often superb, the famous European museums have, naturally enough, a greater number of masterpieces, produced by their own old countries, or bought or stolen from others. (This is far from being an unmitigated advantage. So many masterpieces blunt the brain and reduce the visitor to a comatose dullness. He stops reacting through sheer despair at the multitude of things to which he ought to react. Moreover, a lot of our collections are badly housed, horribly lighted, and unattractively displayed.) I was fascinated first by their flawless taste, arrangement, and clarity of indications, and secondly, by their inventiveness. I think they are the most intelligent museums I have seen, and the most active centres of publicly dispensed knowledge, both by lectures and by demonstrations. They are living. They supply you with something new and relevant, with a connection between yourself and the world of immediate, throbbing discovery.

The planetaria, the exhibitions in geography, industry, machinery, applied science, the unrivalled ethnographical and zoological groups of tribes and animals in their natural habitat of virgin prairies and forests, of untroubled lakes and rivers: all they show is beautiful, instructive and amusing. The most unusual accomplishment of a museum is theirs: they provide enjoyment. I can pay them no higher tribute than that.

A word, before I finish this section, about my enduring love in New York: the Public Library. There is not the shadow of a blemish on my recollections of it. It is perfect. How on earth did this city achieve such a miracle of dignity, graciousness and peace? And use it and appreciate it as it evidently does? You go to that handsome sober building, standing in its pleasant grounds, and you pass from the vociferation and turmoil and materiality of Fifth Avenue into another plane. Silent hospitality of noble rooms, helpful friendliness of an admirable staff, thousands of quiet figures working and reading in an almost religious atmosphere of both detachment and concentration, order, calm, respect for one's own and others' minds. My bafflements and exasperations fall from me like an ugly garment. This is the air and the food I need; this, sanctuary in a brutal and overpowering world; this, a vision of eternity amidst an ephemeral people racing to its death. *Je suis dans ma patrie.*

Somehow or other, I must reach a conclusion regarding New York. Unlovable and unloved, it is yet envied and imitated. It is, in America herself, the target for the contempt, antipathy and suspicion of the other States, of the provincials, of the farmers. They call it the "Forty-Ninth State," they revile it for its wickedness, they are afraid of its encroachments, they are angry at its arrogance. But in spite of this it sets a note, to the glamour and prestige of which they succumb, in dress, literature, art, intellect, science. The tentacles of its finance and trade cover the country. The solutions of the problems of America at large, such as



housing, hygiene, urbanism, social welfare, education, assimilation, are arrived at first in the metropolis and diffused throughout the whole nation. It has invented a new form of city, with its canyons, pinnacles, spires, high terraces, aerial wire-hung bridges, its sky-line, its billions of lights, its subterranean system of corridors, conduits and pipes. Only an excrescence of America, it is nevertheless a microcosm of America, and though you do not know America when you know New York, the trends of that mighty continent are all to be found in the fantastic and incalculable city.

To Europe, it is a menace and a model. It is a menace to her culture, which it is indubitably invading. In our souls, in our conception of civilization, which is becoming more and more mechanized and industrialized, materialistic and rationalistic, in our houses, our clothes, our food, we can all discover manifest traces of New York standards and customs. Personally I consider this invasion a calamity, for whatever New York touches becomes common and de-individualized, but though Europe sets up a loud lamentation on this score, and flings denunciations and maledictions about, I do not commiserate her in the least. If she really cared for her culture, she would protect it: New York, however pernicious we may think it, cannot be expected to suppress itself and its peculiar genius because we are too flabby to resist infection. But it is also a model of business, efficiency, pep, speed, advanced institutions and magnificence—and from this angle New York has certainly not been exclusively harmful to Europe, for in some ways she urgently needed a shot in the arm. The danger is that she might go further than mere invigoration and become an addict to the New York medicine, but here again she should exercise judgment. God knows she is old enough to have learnt a little sense!

And now—since after all this book is being written as much for my own self-expression as for the enlightenment of others—what is New York to me? In the early stages of my stay there, I thought it the embodiment of violence, sensational-

ism, vulgarity, of the idolatry of success, of the most complete integration of man's practical energies and material discoveries that has yet been made, and of the enslavement of human beings to their own redoubtable creation. It is all that, but it is also more than that. Later on I saw profounder processes and sensed more significant irradiations. Of all the cities of America, it is the one where there is the least intolerance and inquisition. Speech, writing and opinion are entirely free; sources of knowledge are open and accessible to everyone, the range of easily available information is amazing. Of all the cities that exist, it offers one most chances: anything may happen in it, anybody may become somebody, dreams have more actual probability of achievement than anywhere else in the modern world. You can turn over, you can begin again, destiny can be retrieved and exploration continue. A bold and incessant spirit of experimentation informs its manifestations—and this, I perceived, prevails not merely in business, but in every direction, for at one point in all domains New York pushes progress to its apogee. Its generosity is unexcelled: alone, it pours out more money for causes than all the States put together. Without pause and without fear, and to an extent that makes Paris seem timid and London dull, it throws up ideas and starts ventures. Always, it is fermenting and reaching out; it accepts no limit and no termination. Indomitable in its ascension, it has no Dead End.

. . . And so, perhaps, that is what it stands for: an example of the multitudinous faculties of man, at their worst and at their best, but in all cases at their keenest—and the dominant impression which emerges at length from its virtues and vices, its complexities and crudenesses, its effervescences and depths, the impression that remains most enduringly in the mind of the onlooker whom it astonishes, repels and stimulates, is that of torrential, unconquerable and inexhaustible life. But the American spirit, the American culture, and the American destiny, it does *not*, thank God, represent.

## § 7

I had no desire whatsoever to write the section that follows. Philip made me. But not before we quarrelled.

"Do you imagine," I asked him hotly, "that I crossed three thousand miles of a horrible ocean, on a blasted British ship, to contemplate European peoples, characteristics, and habits? You know perfectly well I came over here to forget them. What do you mean by trying to foist our bloody continent on me again?"

"Exactly what I say," replied Philip. "Half the population of New York is foreign. It is the first Jewish city in the world, the second Italian, the third German, and the capital of Ireland. How can you do your duty as a commentator on New York if you omit to describe half its population?"

"It isn't the most important half."

"Why not? If it wasn't there, New York would be American; since New York is not American, but international and cosmopolitan, the foreign population evidently plays an essential rôle in its composition and temper. Besides," continued Philip, warming up, too, "this eternal song of yours about your dislike and disgust for Europe is an excuse. You are an abominably lazy woman who would do anything under the sun—lie in bed all day as well as all night and read detective stories—rather than take pains. Your one idea is to avoid, evade, skimp, skip, squeeze or squirm out of an industrious, persevering and meticulous attention to the subjects which you should study. If there is the slightest trouble involved in an investigation, you will forgo it. The last thing you are prepared to do in any circumstance or on any matter is to Apply the Seat of your Pants to the Seat of your Chair. The truth about you is that you are a shirker."

"Me!" I cried, suffocating with indignation. "Me a shirker, when I stayed four months in a scorching, blistering, sweltering, broiling small town in one of the Southern States of America, to write up every detail of the philosophy and

policies of the Tennessee Valley Authority! Me a shirker, when I've spent most of my life ascending frozen mountains and riding across sizzling deserts and fording tumultuous rivers and exploring forgotten cities and being starved and shot at and put into prison and eaten away piecemeal by lice and rats so as to add with exactitude to the world's knowledge! Why, it's my hunger and thirst for accuracy that's turned me into a haggard desiccated old woman before my time! Besides, in this case, it is emphatically not a question of applying the seat of my pants to the seat of my chair. It is a question of exploring on foot the streets and tenements of New York. Have you the indecency to suggest that I should walk about New York with a chair attached to my behind? And, anyway, why should I have to look at European faces and homes and dirt and poverty and hear European languages and observe European modes of living in America?"

"They are part of America."

"Then she had no business to include them. She started badly enough as it was, confused and mixed to a degree; all she's done now is to go and make herself more of a mongrel than ever."

There was a pause. "Don't let me catch you calling yourself a Liberal again," said Philip coldly.

Well, I'm sorry, but it is a source of tremendous irritation to be almost unable to discover an undiluted American in New York. Not that undiluted Americans are perfection, far from it, but at least they are unfamiliar, and excite my interest. What interest can I unearth in specimens from my own continent, which I know by heart? Wherever they go, they trail with them the odour of Europe, which is offensive to my nostrils. Still, I was stung by Philip's criticism, and I got a move on. Friends took me in their cars to the far-lying suburbs. I went through the slums on my own swollen and blistered feet. And I borrowed so many books from the Public Library, and kept them so long before I could bring

myself to read them, that even this adorably tolerant institution was compelled to fine me. But I fought, albeit ungraciously, what that sanctimonious Philip terms the good fight, and here are the results. I don't accept responsibility if they are boring.

New York has a total population of some seven and a half million people, and is composed of five boroughs: Manhattan, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens and Richmond. Of Manhattan, I trust I've given you a faint idea. Richmond is featureless; Queens seems to consist chiefly in wide open cemeteries; the Bronx is a cheap, dull, unfinished district, with more than its fair share of the usual American rubble heaps, and rows of apartment houses that look like barracks, akin to the monotonous new suburbs we are tacking on to many of the European capitals. Where it scores is in the possession of handsome parks, of which the magnificent Bronx Park is the king, and an equally magnificent Zoo and Botanical Garden. It has a special population, lower middle-class, upper working-class, and Jews; a special accent that is recognizable all over America; and if you live in it you exist only bodily. Socially you are quite dead. Brooklyn is very curious: a mixture of great avenues, fine shops, lovely or quaint eighteenth-century houses still unspoilt, squalor, slums, and a terrific amount of crime. The things in it that struck me most were Columbia Heights, which look across the East River all over Manhattan and down the Hudson—one of the vastest and noblest views of which any city can boast—and a brilliantly illuminated street that has the double horror of an Elevated above and a tramcar below, running and clanking and screaming simultaneously and ending in a circle where four trains knock their heads together, with a noise for which no language I know has any words, over a wilderness of rails.

The foreign quarters are scattered among all the boroughs, and the last census showed that the number of their denizens who were born abroad totalled two million and a half souls.

If to this number you add the adults who have become naturalized, and their children who are only first-generation Americans, you will be correct in saying that half the New Yorkers, whatever their legal label, are of foreign extraction. There are fifty-two newspapers published in twenty-two different tongues. There are Jewish, Spanish, Italian theatres. There are synagogues, mosques, churches of every denomination. The strongest and the weakest of every nation, the finest and the most infamous, those who left their country to serve their God and obey their conscience in their own fashion, or to escape extermination, or to run away from the law, or to better themselves economically, flocked in scores of myriads to the city. New York had its outbreaks of malevolence, as when Peter Stuyvesant ruled that the Jews were an encumbrance of the earth and refused to let them live within the precincts of the town, or when it burnt witches, Catholic priests and Negroes, but to give it its due, it was more of an asylum for the poor and oppressed of Europe, it accorded them more opportunities than any other place, at any time. Often, to be sure, New York proved a callous stepmother, inflicting merciless hardships and disappointments on the exiles; the conditions prevailing in the foreign quarters as recently as twenty-five years ago, from the standpoint of housing, hygiene, and sweated labour, were as ghastly as anything that could be found in the most backward parts of Europe. Hundreds of thousands of those immigrants who had put their hope and faith in America lived and died as exploited and miserable there as they would have lived and died in their own lands. But no one can deny that the Great Republic bestowed upon them political and religious freedom, and that though economically many failed and were crushed, the proportion of those who were able to improve their lot in the United States, attain to education and rise to a social status almost impossible to achieve under their own governments was, from the first, immeasurably higher than in Europe.

The foreign quarters are all—save the German—poor quarters, and when they are inhabited by the Oriental and Latin races, they are downright slums. Exploring them I did not feel, as a European, that my continent had contributed much to the American civilization by sending over hordes of such a calibre. But I found that the Americans themselves were much more tolerant and generous than I. They are very willing to admit that the foreign-born constitute a ferment in the intellectual and artistic domains which has been, and is, exceedingly valuable. But as one does not know how a purely Anglo-Saxon America would have evolved, it is superfluous to discuss the question. What seemed to me apparent was that in New York the poor Europeans displayed all their engaging native traits: dirtiness, smelliness, noisiness, squabblingness, a truly European hate and suspicion of each other—and the older generations are so recalcitrant to assimilation that they still can hardly speak English intelligibly. Poor things, I was glad that their circumstances were more fortunate than at home, but on the whole I was ashamed of them.

There is a story of a foreign social-welfare worker who recently arrived from Europe to study living conditions in New York, and was conducted on a tour through the worst districts. After having walked for hours, she turned to her American guides and said: "Yes, this is all very interesting, but unhappily my time is very limited. Do please show me the slums." Maybe the anecdote is not true, but it is plausible. I have been a social-welfare worker myself in several European countries, and if the visitor in question did make that remark, I can understand her mistake. From the point of view of external appearances, the houses are much more respectable than the corresponding tenements in many old European towns. The owners of the New York buildings are subject to strict regulations concerning façades and fire-escapes (although the latter cannot be what they should, judging by the number of deaths due to burning) and one

rarely sees such exterior decrepitude and ruin as on our continent. But the interior arrangements are another pair of shoes. Up to date, the authorities have condemned over two million flats as unfit for human habitation, but as there is a frightful shortage of low-priced apartments, a large number of "Old Law" tenements are still in use—the kind that have no heat, no warm water and no toilet facilities except a privy in the backyard for dozens of tenants. The prevalent type of lodging is the "railroad" flat, that is, a front room with one or two windows that give on the street, a back room with a tiny aperture that gives on a dead wall, and, in between, rooms with no ventilation or light at all. New York took an unconscionable time to begin housing its poor decently; during the last decade it bestirred itself, made a lot of gigantic projects, federal and municipal, and is actually erecting modern buildings, abolishing black filthy side-alleys to enlarge streets and rail off playgrounds, with the result that the unspeakable conditions described by writers of, say, Theodore Dreiser's period, are the exception rather than the rule. But it has not caught up yet in the least with the post-War efforts of Vienna, Berlin, London and Paris (Scandinavia, Holland and Switzerland had done wonders before the War), and as for the rents, I stopped inquiring what they were for fear I'd have an apoplectic stroke.

I don't dare push criticism too far, as a European, because the Americans might suddenly take to playing the awful *tu quoque* game, and then, where, oh where, should I be? But on the other hand, I could legitimately argue that although the worst New York tenements are not as bad as those in the Balkan cities, for instance, it was easier for a metropolis which has an annual expenditure of one billion five hundred million dollars to tackle this matter of slum clearance successfully than for any of our own capitals. You can't claim—and claim justifiably—that you are the richest country in the world, and the most democratic to boot, without being immediately challenged to prove what your resources and your



system have done for your poor. However, I'll say this for New York: its indigents are to-day beschooled, beserved, bevisited, behospitalized and generally behelped to an amazing extent, and it has also managed to communicate to them something of its own vitality. Even in the midst of the most dreadful squalor, the poor show hope, ambition and initiative—a tonic quality which I had never before encountered to the same degree. The mainspring is, I think, the universal faith which centres on the children: their progress, their success in school, their opportunities, the promise they hold out of escape from the circumstances that trapped the parents. If I tried to summarize the innumerable conversations I've had with the New York poor, I'd find that half of them consisted in the description of their physical ailments—the Jews and the Irish being past masters in such self-dramatizations—and half in the glowing, the proud, the happy recital of their sons' and daughters' "smartness" and aspirations. Indeed, because of this indefatigable faith in the future, the word "slum" itself, which connotes an invincibly apathetic acquiescence in misery and degradation, is not strictly applicable to the poor quarters of New York. They are too energetic and have too keen a zest for living.

But their "romance," if it ever existed—which I profoundly doubt—has now entirely evaporated. It is extraordinary how people will insist on labelling "romantic" anything that is a muck-heap or a hot-bed of vice! I've heard the word applied to the Five Points section of New York, otherwise the "Bloody Ould Sixth Ward," which only within living memory has ceased to be a district of the vilest tenements and the headquarters of notorious gangs whose record of murder, arson, robbery and outrage is unequalled in the annals of crime. What *might* be found interesting is the study of the temperaments and habits of the various nationalities, emphasized among the older generation, for schools, factories, the cinema, sports, Americanize the children rapidly, at least as to material standards. In

the dull red-brick Chinese streets you get hieroglyphic sign-boards, sham pagoda-style houses, novelty shops full of faked souvenirs. Indeed, you carry away the impression that in this quiet and secretive neighbourhood, where the little half-caste boys and girls are so graceful, all is faked: joss-houses, dope-houses, restaurants, masks, music—all except the laundries, which are virtually a monopoly of the Chinese, and “fan-fan,” where they lose or gain fortunes. The “stupefied” opium smokers on view are hired nightly, and even murders are staged. If the Chinese *tongs* still continue, they are unknown to the Whites, and the assassinations, I was authoritatively told, are not political but purely commercial, provoked by the divulging of secrets in the narcotic traffic of which Chinatown is the centre for the whole continent. There are any number of missions for the heathen, but I am ready to bet that these earnest Christian efforts are perfectly useless, for if I know anything of the Chinese, they will go imperturbably wherever they think it is advantageous for them to go, and in reality just quietly remain themselves.

The economical and calculating Greeks, born advertisers and exploiters, particularly of their own race, run coffee-houses, banking-houses, barber shops, ice-cream parlours and small quick-lunch rooms everywhere, and have filched the shoe-shine and fruit-stand business from the Italians, who cannot bear them. The swarthy loose-garmented Syrians also specialize in restaurants and money-lending, and the black-eyed, long-nosed, sallow-faced Armenians, the shrewdest business men in the city, all self-appointed representatives of relief organizations for their country (this profitable little industry is lagging now that Soviet Russia has absorbed Armenia), wrest the Oriental restaurants from the Greeks and the Syrians and peddle, besides, in carpets and embroidered stuffs, their immemorial stand-by. Of all the foreign communities these three, Greeks, Armenians and Syrians, live in the most repulsive sordidness, the most broken streets, crooked stairways and dark noisome houses, and

frankly, I cannot see what they bestow upon New York beyond smells, olive-oil, cooked tomatoes, garlic, rugs, and the sharpest kind of double-dealing. The Balkan quarters did not seem to me the acme of rectitude and cleanliness, either. The Gypsies, erratic and nomadic, settle in the town for the winter and take to the road in spring. Their chief activities appear to be the weaving of baskets, telling of fortunes, dancing, singing, playing the cymbalom and buying wives; and their chief merit, a dash of vividness and colour which does not counterbalance sufficiently, to my mind, their irresponsibility and ignorance. The Poles, mostly unskilled labourers with a very small earning capacity and inordinately large families, faithfully reproduce the traits that make them so unpleasant in Europe: bad neighbours, overflowing with grievances, vanity, snobbishness and inherited century-old quarrels with everyone else. Out of none of these races has any figure emerged that helped America in any way.

It is a relief to pass on to the Czechs, who are distinctly of a higher culture than the rest of the East Europeans. An honourable people, with a natural love for history and politics, quiet, cautious and industrious, their steady intellectual and artistic influence is an asset to the country. The Spaniards, in some of whose streets you get a glimpse of painted houses, large staircases and railed-in front gardens, are a small but characteristic community, proudly reticent and discreet: they have made no impress on American life. The French in New York are exactly what they are everywhere abroad: bourgeois, commercial, *routiniers*, lamentable propagandists (like all Latins), they take less than any other people from their surroundings. For in their essence the French have always been impregnable and inadaptable. Entrenched in the conviction that their civilization is the most reasonable possible, all over America I found them attached to, and dependent on, their own traditions solely, with no love for other customs and a very faint appreciation of other peoples.

Their satisfaction, not so much with themselves as with *la France*, renders them so egocentric that they participate only formally in American life, and it is both curious and distressing to observe how this blind patriotic complacency has reduced their influence in the New World. Too obviously uninterested in America, in spite of the atmosphere of romance and sentimental gratitude the Americans built round their land so long and so tenaciously, their intense parochialism is directly responsible for their loss of ground—and it annoyed me to frenzy to see them wane while the English waxed. For whatever may be the inner opinion the English have of the United States, they court the latter with the utmost assiduousness and dexterity, and again and again I came across British propagandists, quite unofficial, of course, travelling in America merely to “study the admirable institutions of the great sister-country,” and gathering up the flattered political, civic, and social lights like shoals of fish in their beautifully concealed net. These muddle-headed sons of perfidious Albion, afflicted with a chronic confusion of thought, are infinitely better psychologists than my own lucid and logical race.

The Scandinavians and Germans, on the other hand, made themselves part of the bloodstream of America from the beginning. The rôle of the Swedes, Norwegians and Danes being preponderant in the farming States, I shall speak of it later, but the Germans, combined with the Austrians, number over a million in New York alone; they have marked it indelibly, and their mark was incontestably excellent. The Germans came to New York at its birth as a city; they gave it pioneers who fought indomitably for religious freedom; its first public-spirited mayor; a governor who called the first Congress of the American Colonies to protest against the oppressions of the British Government (which hanged him for treason in 1691); and the man to whom is due the establishment of the liberty of the press in America, Peter Zenger. He was persecuted and imprisoned, his paper was destroyed

by the public hangman, but he won recognition for his inconceivably bold principles long before they triumphed in Europe. From the outset, therefore, the Germans showed the sturdiest civic spirit, and it was reinforced, after the Liberal Revolution of 1848 had failed in Germany, by the finest leaders in that country, who fled to New York. With integrity and consistency, they engaged not only in honourable commercial professions but in all the wider projects that were good for the city, working on communal lines for the benefit of all: an honest press, education, medicine and the arts. They founded the Philharmonic Society in 1842, a theatre when the stage was non-existent, produced Beethoven and Wagner, operatic conductors, composers, and popularized orchestral music. (Less than a century after, their fellow-countrymen in Germany were burning books!) Though they considered that most other races were inferior to their own, they did not keep aloof like the critical self-centred French, but intermarried, albeit slowly, with the rest of the population, propagating their original characteristics and the whole-hearted interest they took in their new country. They maintained their Lutheran churches, their first-rate choirs and organs, their hundreds of old *Weinstuben* and saloons and coffee-houses and pastry-shops and libraries, and those model dispensaries and hospitals which built up so permanently the German prestige that even to-day the foreign poor would rather go to a German doctor than to their own—never completely abandoning their quarters, clinging to their old-fashioned, antiques-decorated, flower-gardened houses set back from the sidewalks, and the typical delicatessen stores, which they will not sell.

Notwithstanding its deserved reputation for honesty, when America went into the War the German community had a rough time of it, what with excited patriotism, spy-mania, and the usual crass political tactlessness of the *Vaterland*. That blew over as soon as America became psychologically normal, but after the advent of Hitler to power, the German-

Americans split again and now are taking sides. As I write, there is no doubt at all that Nazi camps are multiplying in the country, with all the attendant repulsive grotesquenesses of heiling, parading, saluting, swastika-worship (and beer and gymnastics on the side). The specific German talent for blustering, bullying, insulting, and making enemies—a talent which has always gone hand in hand with the real virtues of the race—is once more getting a pretty thorough work-out in the United States.

The Italians in New York are more numerous than in any of their cities at home. Before it acclimatized itself, the first generation, ignorant, half-starved, ready to do any job at a pitiful wage, was extremely turbulent, ardently addicted to revolver and knife-play, and generally formed a major contribution to the criminality of the American metropolis. Gangs and brothels commanded an impressive array of Italian names—they still do, though I am told on all sides that the actual trend is towards better self-discipline. *In sha-allah!* When I went to the famous Line-up, however, at the New York Police headquarters, where noted criminals are brought up, for future identification, on a stage, in the merciless white glare of blinding lamps, in front of an audience of hundreds of detectives, a substantial percentage of those deadly wicked figures turned out to be Italian. In fact, the majority of those coldly-corrupted vipers, belonging to the sub-world of racketeers and grafters, gunmen, pimps, molls and kidnappers, are of foreign origin: something which may well give food for thought to a European when he is tempted to comment on the stench and decay of public morality in America. I do not say these things out of malice, for though my admiration for contemporary Italy is precisely nil, I am keenly aware of the artistic, lively and endearing Italian attributes. I know, too, that the Italians have injected a quickening element into American national life—but at the same time they have been a particularly unruly, troublesome, and vicious factor socially. Poor dear

America, who likes to think of herself as a melting-pot! Sometimes it seems to me that a chamber-pot would be nearer the mark, the most copious portion of the ingredients having been furnished by Europe.

"Little Italy" is, with the Jewish quarter, the most noisy and animated foreign district in New York. I do not call it picturesque because I am unable to discern picturesqueness in foul untidiness and dirt, and Little Italy is, architecturally and humanly, supremely untidy and dirty. But it teems with activity. Swarms and swarms and swarms of children; midwives' signs all over the place; ceaseless shouting and chattering of adults from door to door and from window to window, over the lines of the multi-coloured, patched, fluttering wash; shrill cries of vendors in Italian. On the sidewalks, deep cellar stores and restaurants, small, poky, unclean groceries, fruit and vegetable push-carts (fine products from the Italian gardens round New York), sweat-shops, old-clothing exchanges, a multitude of indescribable objects just piled into a balance-scale, weighed, paid for, and carried off. A whole street is devoted to selling all that comes out of garbage pails, everything that the city has used and thrown away. Funerals, fiestas, processions for saints—each street having its own saint, and each gang of worshippers reviling the others—dog-fights, churches, newspaper offices, music shops, theatres. Over all and everywhere, the invincible odour of fried fish, oil, sweat, incrustated grime: the peculiar flavour of Latin poverty. The Italians are engaged in every kind of business that stands for sweating and being sweated; a great many of the men work as waiters, and the women as seamstresses (and good ones) in the dress-and-lingerie shops. The talk is mainly in Italian, the older generation rarely troubling to learn English—when it does, it produces an extraordinary jargon; and there is invariably something distinctively foreign about the population, for even if he is Americanized you can recognize an Italian at once. They intermarry with all the other nations, displaying no pre-

judice even against Negroes; they overrun all the neighbourhoods; they are prolific to a degree; and as a general offset to their shortcomings, it may be truthfully said that they serve America by absorbing antagonistic tribal bloods.

The Negro district of New York is Harlem, and a very incongruous setting for the race. Many decades ago, Harlem was the residence of a sober, respectable, prosperous middle class, which built unto itself large, solid, dark, cold, ugly houses with features that remind one strongly of the ponderous homes of the English Victorian bourgeoisie. As New York grew and shifted the social accent to other neighbourhoods, the original inhabitants of Harlem moved into the new fashionable quarters, and Germans, Gentiles and Jews, took their place; but they too abandoned Harlem when small bright modern flats were constructed. Harlem went through a severe real-estate slump, and landlords, to cover carrying expenses, began to rent to Negroes, with the result that the district was evacuated by the Whites. At that time a medley of reasons—lynchings, burnings, persecutions in Chicago, St. Louis, Atlanta and the South generally—caused an enormous influx of Negroes into New York. They congregated, naturally enough, in Harlem, and the congestion and exploitation in the district immediately became appalling. Speculators turned the houses into tenement flats and put up the rents shamelessly; cornered by the high prices and the impossibility of living elsewhere, the Negroes subdivided their apartments and Harlem rapidly was converted into a black slum, and one of the poorest, filthiest and most unhealthy parts of the metropolis, where the birth-rate just keeps pace with the death-rate of infants, though the latter are ushered into this vale of tears with the same ease and unremittingness as preside over the procreation of little guinea-pigs.

There are about half a million Negroes in the city, and never did you see anything like the variety of types among



them, all sizes and all shades: the immense lumbering truly ape-like Negro, black as coal, the bronze or mahogany or blue-eyed or fair-haired Negro, mixtures of Negro and French, Italian, Slav, Mexican, Indian, the fat comfortable mammy, old-style, and the young employees of shops and hotels, new-style—the girls as modish, the men as jaunty, as possible. (The Negro form of masculine dandiness is very amusing: suits squeezed in at the waist like wasps, abnormally broad padded shoulders, hat on one eye, twirling cane and a shatteringly roguish smile.) Four-fifths of the Negroes in New York have white blood, and it modifies colour and features in innumerable ways.

I do not intend to tackle the Negro question in this chapter, for New York does not give a comprehensive idea of it: you must travel in the South to understand it fully. But of course you get any amount of intimations about it, for in spite of the fact that the city boasts of a *relatively* tolerant attitude towards the coloured people, it is very far indeed from having achieved genuine liberalism. The aversions as regards the hue of the skin, the smell, speech, food, mentality and morals of the Negro are inveterate. It seems to me that each major sense of the White has been poisoned against the Black, and rare and heroic are the individuals who struggle successfully against this organic antipathy. There is a certain mixing of Whites and Blacks in some literary and artistic circles, but the little I saw of these relations struck me as uneasy and spurious—too ostentatiously unconventional on the part of the Whites, not really natural on the part of the Blacks. The restaurants, trains, buses, the Subway, and an infinitesimal number of cheap hotels are accessible to the Negro, but outside these concessions the taboo works brutally. I remember as I write the case of Chris Matthews, one of Harvard's greatest athletes, who during his training was not allowed to eat at the same table as his team-mates; and after his swim in the Annapolis pool, the water was drained, though he had won the championship

for his side. These meannesses are really very beastly, and after so many months spent in America, loving and understanding the Americans more and more, I still can't unravel these entirely pathological impulses.

The range of the occupations within the reach of the Negroes is very small; they are almost universally employed in menial capacities, hewers of wood and drawers of water; when they enter the liberal professions as doctors or lawyers or schoolmasters, they have to do exclusively with their own people. For them, there can be no White clientèle. The trade-unions for a very long time refused to admit them; they were grudgingly granted membership in some fields when it was feared they would act as strike-breakers and scabs, but it is only since the dissident Labour leader, John L. Lewis, formed his "Committee for Industrial Organization" that they have been taken into account. From the point of view of the law, no American will deny that the dice are loaded against them; the police round them up *pour un oui ou pour un non*, and I have been categorically told by the directresses of women's prisons I knew in New York that the Negro prostitutes are incessantly subjected to utterly unscrupulous faked frame-ups. Yet, judging from the statistics, they have no more than the ordinary proportion of vice and crime, which is astonishing when one considers that they are kept poor by being paid less than the White man for the same work, that the Relief accorded them is inferior, and that they are barred from so many jobs that many of them are forced into idleness and theft. In the Children's Courts, particularly, the number of young Negro delinquents is disquieting: crowded out, they exist as they can. By the way, it is worth while to attend a Children's Court in New York. The special magistrates there are almost invariably admirable, even if the police are not; whoever hasn't seen a judge trying to disentangle a case where a Negro adolescent is involved, and quietly, kindly, humanely, pursuing his inquiries through the bewildering confusion of naïve, stubborn,

but dreadfully frightened lies, hasn't an idea of what patience is.

Simple, credulous, confident, easily separated from their money, born gamblers, superstitious and passionate, the Negroes have to fight such a lot of temperamental drawbacks, as well as the social, legal and economic disadvantages inflicted on them by an inimical system, that I never cease wondering at the progress they have made. The mischief is that the American judges the Negro, very impatiently, by his own standards, while to be fair the Negro should be compared to other native races in Africa and Asia. It is only then that one can fully appreciate the enormous courage and tenacity with which the American Negro is coping with a code of ethics and a civilization that it took Europe thousands of years to evolve, and that America, Europe's offspring, foisted upon him and his mental nakedness, *tout de go*, leaving him to fumble and grope and adjust himself to an unbelievably alien culture, *mainly alone*. This creature, practically just out of his jungle—for the very slow education of the Negro really began only after the Civil War—was required, in the face of all kinds of opposition, antagonism, contempt, suspicion and injustice, to solve problems that were entirely beyond the scope of his natural make-up, and which we ourselves have never settled satisfactorily. I cannot imagine a more difficult adaptation, nor one in which, on the whole, less help was vouchsafed. It does not surprise me, therefore, that the Negro should still be riddled with hysterical cults, primitive religious beliefs, infantile instincts; that he should be prone to social irresponsibility and to casualness in his conception of morality. I might insert here, with the most rigorous equity, that in the matter of hysterical cults, primitive religious beliefs, and a casual conception of morality, both civic and sexual, a considerable portion of the White population of America is on exactly the same level as the Black. What does surprise me is the intelligence, the earnestness and the discipline of his unflagging efforts to adopt ideas

and institutions so unfamiliar to him, and the unparalleled success he has won, surrounded as he is by obstacles, in so short a time.

In New York, the Negroes are the gayest, the best-mannered, the most obliging, and to my mind at least, the most likeable element in the city. I found the conversations of the ordinary people delightful, shot all through with humour, philosophy, a remarkable psychological perceptiveness, a sort of broad human understanding akin, in its essence, to the realistic Latin view of life. They have developed a music and a poetry of their own, which have now become part of America's heritage; and a startling theatre, common, but informed with a vital and virile force superbly expressed in the elastic and vigorous bodies, the perfect notes, the frenzy of gesticulation, the wild melodious laughs. The cafés and cabarets, however, I thought artificial and repulsive, mixing Black and White performers—all to the disadvantage of the anæmic Whites, so many of them obviously homosexual—and exuding falseness from every pore. Perhaps where they are at their best, because at their happiest, is in their own dance-halls in Harlem—the common dance-halls, open to everyone. It is impossible, watching so much spontaneous joy, grace and fancifulness, such artistry, such rapture in laughter and creativeness, not to feel that their core is still uncorrupted, that their faults are due to passion and not to depravity, and that they can be educated with greater ease than many Caucasian peoples to take their part in the civilization of the future. In such plastic natures, there is yet no decadence to be arrested, no century-hardened vices to be eradicated, no deification of race to overcome. Personally I have a theory: that when they have achieved the training of their instincts, the Blacks, everywhere, will develop a spirit of universality far more rapidly and naturally than we.

Now for East Side, the principal district of the Jews. I kept it for the last, because it was the starting-point of a conflict

in my own mind. The trouble is that one can never merely look at the Jews: one is compelled to go on and discuss them. I had hoped, when I left Europe, that I had done with Israel for ever; I had defended it in lectures and writings, I had tied myself into knots over it, I had been unfathomably bored by it, and I wanted to drop it utterly. I got to the other side of the Atlantic, and there it was again—ubiquitous, shrill, painful, unshelvable and unsolvable. Of all the curses fate has put upon this race, the curse of insistence is the worst.

There are as many different groups of Jews in New York as there are nationalities in the world, and they are only friendly if their nations are friendly. In great calamities which endanger them all as a race, they come together, but in everyday life the various brands are passably antagonistic, and their habits are influenced by the culture of the country from which they originate. The Moroccan and Levantine Jews, for example, or the Galician and Polish and Roumanian Jews, are easily distinguished from Russian or German Jewry: so are their quarters. Some of the streets in East Side are still purely dreadful, reeking of garbage cans, full of foul dilapidated houses of which the lower floors teem with rag-sorters—real slums that are the home of gangsters and criminals, and where the charity organizations chiefly work. Some forty years ago, when the filth and distress and disease and vice were indescribably worse than to-day, the conditions prevailing in this immigrant part of the metropolis spurred that magnificent humanitarian, Lillian Wald, to begin her reclaiming non-sectarian nursing service, by means of which she definitely awakened the civic consciousness of the callous city. But generally speaking, East Side is now on the ascendant.

I am too used to Jewry in East Europe and the Orient to find the quarter strange. Dirt, overcrowdedness, bustle, noise, babble of seller and buyer, the most incongruous wares lying pell-mell together, called out in the sing-song of the

Talmud or with wails like prayers: all these features were familiar to me. Hatless and slippered and slovenly, poor Jewry there is what it is all the world over—a grubby population grubbing for grubby objects, its nose down to the ground for details, shopping, bag in hand, in the tiny sordid stores with their odd ugly special foods and their curious pungent odours, milling round the barrows and carts and stalls, buying necessities a pinch at a time, in penny fractions, tensing its energies in a scramble for infinitesimal objects, absorbed in loud, intense, apparently desperate, but passionately enjoyed haggling about prices; and among these eager, acquisitive, predatory-looking beings, you still encounter men with sidelocks and caftans, and women with wigs over the hair that was shorn on their wedding-day.

Some streets are the gathering-places of all the nations: Orchard Street, of push-cart fame, where the litter is indestructible; Delancey Street, where all the fish in the sea seem to have been emptied on the slippery slimy cement floor under the bridge, and goods are hawked in a hundred strident tongues by men, women and children. There was nothing uplifting either in the *décor* or in the people, and I thought it intolerably irrational that the metropolis of the New World should present me with the spectacle of such a blend of small, fierce and absurd activities, every whit as odious as the spectacles characteristic of the most miserable little cities in the Levant—but the sheer vitality of the scene grips one. You sense there the undying pertinacity, industry and ingenuity, the superhuman endurance that in hundreds of thousands of cases enabled Jews who had started life in America quite destitute, to rise till they escaped from East Side to the Bronx, or to Morningside and Riverside Drives, the better Jewish neighbourhoods. I repeat that America certainly wasn't, for all the European immigrants, the beneficent goddess dispensing largesse that they so poignantly dreamt of in their own cruel countries, but to the Jews she has always been infinitely kinder and juster than we.

Their history in New York is interesting. Three hundred years ago a ship brought a group of Sephardic Jews to what was then New Amsterdam. Fleeing from persecution, they had hoped the town would be hospitable, for Holland had been very tolerant to the Jews who had emigrated from Spain. But Peter Stuyvesant, the head of the town, unexpectedly proved so hostile that the small community had to settle outside the city, and Jewish society remained restricted until the German immigration of 1848, when cultured Liberal thinkers, many of them Hebrews, came over from Europe. The merchant element followed—clerks and dealers from the commercial towns of Germany, accustomed to trade with the Dutch and the English—and they laid the foundations of great fortunes, building up especially that clothing industry which is so powerful to-day. The third invasion took place in the 'eighties and 'nineties, and was a veritable avalanche. Masses of Russian Jews, working-men, tailors, weavers, furriers, everlastingly pogromed in Russia and Galicia, crossed the Atlantic and were immediately put into factories and shops, at starvation wages, by the German Jews, who developed an unlimited genius for exploiting their hapless co-religionaries. What with this viciously cheap labour, into which children were pitilessly driven, overwork (sixteen hours' toil a day, in rickety dark dens with no windows or sanitary conveniences, where the whole family slept huddled at night), underfeeding, insufficient housing, a sweated slumdom, as abject as anything in Europe but new in America, was promptly created. How can I avoid being vexed with Europe when I see what kind of human detritus she unloaded on America, and how she contributed to contaminate a national mentality which had had genuine democratic aspirations? And how can I avoid being vexed with America when I see how eagerly she succumbed to all the European infections? Oh, dear! My gorge rises against both god-awful continents! One of them already diseased, the other jumping at the chance of catching the same rotten-

ness. Won't I discover *anywhere*, before I die, a little spot of earth where this nauseating species of ours lives clean? But by dint of subsisting so degradingly and working so slavishly, these Russian and Galician Jews underbid their German Jew bullies in such a way that in a decade or two the clothing, underwear and shirt industries passed into their own hands. The moment they got on top, however, they applied the tactics of the bosses they had superseded to the fresh batches of exiles that constantly kept arriving—the process was the same, only the victims changed: incidentally, a particularly ugly characteristic of the race which comes deep, I think, from its Oriental origins. Bah!

"Where is the justice of saying 'Bah'?" asked Philip. "I have yet to learn that the Christian French and English—and Americans—whose origins are not Oriental, when *they* step from the ranks of the working-men to the ranks of the masters, behave like great humanitarians towards those of their own people whom they then employ. What is the use of such irrelevant ejaculations?"

"Oh, leave me alone!" I cried. "I shall die of disappointment. This is the same old dung-heap all over again. I tell you I had hoped to find something *New*."

"In that case, you had better remove yourself from the planet," said Philip.

Still, there is another aspect to be noted. The perennial corrective to the Jewish vices, also innate to the Jewish soul, manifested itself forcibly. At the same time as the workmen's immigration, a political Hebrew exodus from Europe had occurred. It was the days of the Nihilist movement, in which the young Jews played a preponderant rôle. Escaping from Russia, from Siberia, from the mines of Saghalien and Kamchatka, the conspirators, mostly university students, sought refuge in New York, and while the Russian Jew merchants were building up their enormous business, the Russian Jew revolutionaries fought the sweat-shops and the exploiters with the indomitable energy they had displayed against the



Czar, the nobles, and the bureaucracy at home. They organized trade unions and strikes, and founded the first Socialist groups. They also gave a superb impetus to Russian literature, music and art in the city, which was almost completely devoid of such interests (long before the Moscow Art Theatre appeared, the Jewish Art Theatre was playing Ibsen and Chekhov and Andreev), and they established a Yiddish culture which persists in the newspapers, books, schools, educational alliances and political clubs of which East Side is the cradle. Opinions may differ as to the value of the ideas they propagated in America, but that they were an intellectual and artistic ferment of tremendous significance and far-reaching effects, no one can deny.<sup>1</sup>

### § 8

Having got thus far in the writing of my manuscript, I had words again with Philip.

"Finished!" I said to him triumphantly. "I yielded to your pestering and have dealt with the foreign communities in New York. Now, except for the Negroes—and perhaps the Japanese when I reach California—I shall never refer again to any alien group in America."

"How so?" inquired Philip. "You haven't even glanced at the Jewish question yet."

<sup>1</sup> There is a quarter of New York called Greenwich Village, which foreigners always ask to see. Once upon a time it was a farming area and the houses were built on their own plots, so that everything was irregular and original, not laid out in advance, but with a haphazard winding of streets and alleys. Some thirty years ago Greenwich Village had the reputation of being the American equivalent of Montmartre. People flocked to it from all the States so as to live, think, and love there unfettered, it was the chosen dwelling-place of writers and artists and students, and its bohemianism and immorality were celebrated. A very great deal of admirable work, however, was done by serious and consistent intellectual labourers, almost half the literature of America was written in Greenwich Village and the greater part of American painting, sculpture and composition of music was produced in its studios.

The Village is now a silly place, where fake attractions have been built as in a fair, exploiting its reputation of exoticism. But though it has lost its flavour one still finds a charm in the jumble and capriciousness of its streets, and in some of the little old houses with their wooden balconies and verandas and their front yards full of flower patches, poplars and acacias.

"I don't intend to."

"You must. It is not nearly as tragical a problem as that of the Negro, but it is a preoccupation of which every American is becoming more and more aware. They are not outspoken enough about it, so it is liable to fester, and that is very dangerous for the moral health of a people. You know perfectly well that you were profoundly taken aback when you realized, not only that it exists, but how acute it already is. It is your Duty to bring it out into the open. The accomplishment of your Duty will, furthermore, afford you the opportunity to do some personal mental cleaning-up. As I have had occasion to point out to you a hundred times, you are, yourself, unpardonably muddle-headed on the subject."

I knew it! I knew it! I *knew* Philip would never miss a chance to make me thoroughly uncomfortable about the Jews! That is partly why I wanted to avoid commenting on the foreign quarters of New York. I guessed they'd lead round to the old distressing wrangle which I cannot settle either to my satisfaction or to his. Philip's contention is that almost all of us, however Liberal, international, impartial, we believe ourselves to be, have in a varying degree a traditional dislike of the Jews; that we refuse to pull it out of the recesses of our brain and face it squarely; and that, thus repressed, it results in a subtle mental distortion and justification of cruelty. He says that I am an excellent example of this instinct, for I always begin by declaring that I admire certain Jewish traits, that I possess many Jewish friends, that I would never dream of discriminating against Jews *qua* Jews—and then, having given that much satisfaction to my conscience, I proceed to pour out all the age-long prejudices that confirm both my hearers and myself in a profound unavowed antipathy. He repeated this accusation.

"Allow me to remind you," I said with an uneasy attempt at dignity, "since you invariably forget the good I try to do but inexorably remember the smallest of my failings, that I recently wrote a small book attacking Nazi Germany, in

which one of my weightiest arguments against the régime was its insane and obscene anti-Semitism."<sup>1</sup>

"You could have done no less as an intellectual," replied Philip. "*Noblesse oblige*. But as you are an honest person (save when your vanity has been wounded: when that happens, there are no limits to your capacity for self-foolery) I defy you to deny that at bottom you feel a certain exasperation against the Jews. It is of the first importance that each of us should purge himself, by the discipline of clear thinking, of illogical resentments that are the most fertile seeds of subsequent violence. America is in the same case. If you find out where you stand, and why you stand there, you will be rendering her, too, a service."

Oh, very well, very well! He'll never stop bothering me, so let's get down to it. One comfort is that, at least in this matter, Philip will not be able to reiterate that I do not apply the Seat of my Pants to the Seat of my Chair.

It is incontestable that there is a Jewish question in America. At first sight, it seems quite inexplicable that it should exist at all. The country has a democratic Constitution; its original elements were so heterogeneous that it felt no *a priori* hostility towards foreigners; custom and necessity made it an asylum; it never showed the slightest disposition to religious mass-persecution. America has had no religious wars, massacres, executions, or an Inquisition, at any time in her history. On the other hand, the Jews are less than three per cent of the American population; they never were a financial, economic or racial menace in the United States; Jewish congestion occurs only in a very few highly industrialized and already cosmopolitan cities. Yet there is such keen friction that self-protective organizations have been founded against them; in some of the most famous Universities, only a certain number of Jewish students are accepted in the schools, notably of Law, and they are not admitted to the Gentile fraternities; from the point of view of society,

<sup>1</sup> *Darkness from the North: An Essay in German history.*

they are debarred from entering the principal clubs; the "high" American world does not mingle with them, however honourable and rich they may be; they are banned from certain hotels; and every single sensitive and educated Jew you meet in the United States (I have met a very great many) will tell you that they are discriminated against in the administrations and the official groups, and that from the moment they begin to go to the public schools, social slights are put upon them. Indeed, a deep-seated and enduring sense of mortification is common to all the cultured Jews in America. There is no war between Gentile and Jew: no; but there is distinct antagonism.

That's bad enough, but what perturbed me—what perturbs me to the point of real alarm—is that I am convinced the antagonism is increasing. As I am also convinced that an infallible test of the civilized temper of a nation is its attitude towards the Jews, you will understand why I think the problem serious enough to devote a section to it. If America ever plunges into anti-Semitism, it will mean that she has reverted to savagery—neither more nor less. I shall do something quite desperate if America reverts to savagery. Now, America, listen. In the course of a varied and tumultuous career, I put my faith successively in many and different things: the Protestant Bible, the Roman Catholic Church, Socialism, the War-to-end-War, Reconstruction, the Russian Revolution, the League of Nations, the Unshakableness of the Pound Sterling, my own Soul, and a Great Genius. I saw all my beliefs explode one after the other with a very terrible noise and a very horrible stink—especially my belief in the Russian Revolution and in the Great Genius. Somehow, I managed to pull myself together after every explosion, and resumed my laborious and painful Quest for What could Save Mankind. To-day, in my full maturity, I put my faith in America. But if America lapses into Jew-baiting, and therefore into barbarity, I tell her plainly that I shall throw up my hand and

desist for ever from my laborious and painful Quest for What can Save Mankind. I shall let the Whole World Go to the Devil. Yes, indeed. I earnestly ask America to think over all the implications of this threat, which I shall irrevocably fulfil, and if she is prepared to take on the fearsome responsibility of my letting the Whole World Go to the Devil, well, then, she can just forge ahead with her anti-Semitism. I have nothing more to say, but the odds are that Posterity will not be so magnanimous, and, personally, I should not care to go down to history as the nation that prevented me from Saving Mankind.

The fundamental reason of anti-Jewish feeling in the New World is the same as in the Old. Hostility against the Jews is the heritage of the Christian-European, which America, because of her religious and racial origin, shares. The legacy is due partly to the fanaticism encouraged, if not openly inspired, by the Church, and partly to that psychology of the savage which none of us has outgrown. The instinct of primitive man, who moved in a nightmare of dark and superstitious imaginations and among countless supernatural enemies of his own creation, was to search for a scapegoat on whom he could cast the blame for the woes, sins and follies of his community, and whom he could sacrifice to his scro-cious gods so as to placate them. The instinct of barbaric nations, whatever age they belong to, is similar to that of primitive man: it impels the majority to fall upon an alien minority in times of terror, misery, defeat, in any sort of widespread misfortune, and make it its scapegoat. The Jews, who were an alien minority everywhere became, thanks to the cruelty of Christendom generally, and to the long persistence of primitive psychology, with all its manifestations of irrational fright, communal hatred, persecution and blood-lust, the professional scapegoats of Christian Europe, which segregated them, burnt them, tortured them, pillaged them, and drove them into the wilderness. As reason and knowledge, through the centuries, slowly made a little head-

way against ignorance, blind passions and crude illusions, this attitude was modified in the countries that achieved a measure of civilization—but the civilized crust is very thin, the instincts of the animal and the psychology of the savage lie just beneath the surface of our minds, and so the old atavistic hate and fear of the Jews are latent in every one of us. As soon as civilization commences to fail, as it has done in Germany and is now doing in Poland, they flare up again as part of the general regression to barbarism, and nothing is surer than the fact that declared anti-Semitism is the invariable symptom of the ebb of intelligence, truth, and humanity in a collectivity.

So much for the basis. To this dormant, but real and enduring antipathy for the Hebrews—which, I repeat, Mother Church and Mother Europe together implanted in the Gentile marrow—are to be added grievances that vary according to the conditions and the temperament of each of the nations which shelter the hapless Chosen People. They may be racial, financial, economic, or social, but in some guise or other they are always there. Sometimes these grievances are not motivated in the least, but sometimes they are, completely, for the faults of Israel are as vast and numerous as its virtues and sorrows—which is saying a whole heap—and it is anything but an easy people to get on with. I know what the accusations, just or unjust, are in the European lands, but I did not discover immediately why there is a tendency, apart from inherited inclinations, to dislike the Jews in America. It is not a question of their religion. It is not a question of their religion anywhere to-day, except in so far as one objects to the large, moody, vain and cruel bearded old lunatic they worshipped, and whom they managed to impose upon the Occidental nations as the Creator of the universe. It really is difficult to forgive them for being the initial authors of the Old Testament, so much more influential in moulding our self-righteous punitive mentality than the New, though of course the Europeans

showed just as fierce a disposition by swallowing it whole as the Jews by concocting it. I confess that every time I remember my Protestant youth, which the incalculable Lord God of the Hebrews terrorized, I wonder whether Israel did not deserve the Dispersion. Nor is it a question of apprehension or anger provoked by their sweeping financial, economic or commercial domination: some Jews are very rich, but they are few in comparison with native millionaires, and as for controlling the sources of power, the Americans do that themselves pretty exclusively. The press at large is not manipulated by the Jews. Numerically they are too feeble to exercise a social influence—besides, Jews and Gentiles do not intermarry widely, not nearly as much as in France and England. Why, then, this perceptibly growing tendency to dislike them?

All things examined, I'd say that it dates back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, when enormous swarms of East European Jews invaded America. They were utterly unlike the small settlements, either intellectual or already well-to-do, that had been founded much earlier in the country and were held in esteem. The newcomers were hideously ignorant, poor and dirty, and what they exhibited preponderantly were the most repulsive qualities of their race, for they had lived so long in such circumstances of ignominy and oppression that no other qualities had had the opportunity to develop. Probably these Jews would never have survived at all if their calibre had been finer, but that is beside the point. The point is that they brought over with them the traits and habits of the most debased European ghettos, and their concepts, mentality, standards, practices were so low that I can understand the shocked disgust they roused in the Anglo-Saxon American mind. I felt something of the sort myself, in spite of my pity, when I first contemplated the Jewish quarters in populous cities in the Levant, in Syria, and in North Africa: they seemed to me in their superstitions, squalor, and racial customs, almost nightmarish. I think,

too, that this reaction was complicated, as time went on, by resentment against the socialistic agitation which the Russian Jews, especially, started, and, still later, by the political rôle the Jews played in the great towns where they had agglomerated, and where, by sheer force of numbers and an unbreakable solidarity, they made their vote felt in such an effective fashion that they imposed themselves as a factor of vast importance. In New York particularly the Jewish ballot is so massive and undivided that it can mean victory or defeat in State and municipal elections, and it is incontestable that many Americans chafe at the consideration—which takes all kinds of forms, not always profitable to purely American interests—bestowed by governors and politicians on the Jewish collectivity.

Passing from the level of general, to that of personal, views, if you asked me for my private opinion of the majority of Jews whom I met in America, I'd tell you frankly that I hold them to be very often responsible for the antagonism they engender. The first point in my indictment would concern their manners. In nine cases out of ten, they are abominable. Again and again I felt tempted to suggest to those Jewish women in America who are for ever calling meetings of indignation and protestation, that there would be considerably less ill-will against their communities if the bulk of the Jews showed some signs of breeding, and I'd come out with a definite proposal: that these same indefatigable collectors of funds should build, in every great town, an Institute where Jews could go to learn the rudiments of polite deportment. No, this is not meant to be facetious in the least. Anti-Semitism—even incipient anti-Semitism—is too grave to be turned into a joke. More than in any other advanced nation I have visited, the Jews in the United States shout, push, shove, encroach, are obstreperous, insensitive and over-familiar. The inferiority complex which is perhaps their greatest, though comprehensible curse, leads them in a country where they have acquired total citizenship, to boast,



swagger, exaggerate and pile on their "claims" in an extraordinarily objectionable way. They look upon everything they have got, or want to get, as their due, and they proclaim this conviction at the top of insupportably unpleasant voices. Youthful Jews, who incline towards Communism, are particularly shallow and insolent. I honestly believe this prevailing mannerlessness is one of the causes of the reaction they excite in native Americans, and it is possible that its cumulative effects will result one day in demonstrations of downright aggressiveness. God knows I do not urge the Jews to be subservient, but I do urge them not to play into the hands of their detractors by the gracelessness they display in their tones, gestures, general external behaviour, and their incessant egoistic clamour for their "rights."

It would also be well if they showed less clannishness and favouritism. When one of them gets a footing in a social group or a profession, you may be sure that in a jiffy that group or profession will be invaded by a horde of relatives and friends. There will scarcely be room for anyone else. The impression produced is immediately one of domination. But with a sort of blind obduracy, knowing they inflame exasperation and give excuse for revenge and persecution, they continue intractably on their road.

My second point is that the Jews themselves aggravate the difference between Jew and Gentile. From the hour when they are capable of understanding anything at all, a Jewish consciousness is tirelessly cultivated in the children. To their atavistic inferiority-complex is deliberately and consistently added a persecution-complex, by their own parents and teachers. Their home instruction and their religious celebrations alike hammer into their awareness that they were and are oppressed, were and are martyrs, victims, predestined to insults, affronts, every conceivable injustice. These themes become the basic element of the emotional life of the Jew, and the greater part of his knowledge—you will find, if you question Jews extensively, that they have been taught incom-

parably less about the religious philosophy and principles of Judaism than about their past and present maltreatments: Pharaoh, the Middle Ages, the Spanish Inquisition, the Ghetto, the Pale, the Affaire Dreyfus (I noticed that in this case the iniquitous first verdicts are expiated on, but nothing is said about the magnificent fight the Gentiles waged for that officer's subsequent vindication) are always cropping up, as well as the Ku Klux Klan, the university quotas, the club and hotel restrictions. The Jews really *train* themselves to be abnormal, and the young Hebrew goes out into the world with a chip on his shoulder. Inconsiderate to a degree with regard to others, he is morbidly hypersensitive with regard to himself, and a separatist in his practical conduct.

What can you do with a mind that creates false issues constantly because it insists on reacting, not from the point of view of the individual, but from the point of view of a race? It poisons human relationships and social intercourse, it fosters a mania for blind retaliation, manifest in the disposition to revolutionarism of the Jews, and, furthermore, it functions as a boomerang—and a deadly one. The mental habit the Jews acquire from infancy, of ascribing all their calamities and humiliations to Gentile prejudice and malice, results in a total incapacity for self-criticism. Their self-deceit becomes pathological. Have you ever heard a Jew admit that the reason for his afflictions or failures might be faults in his personal make-up? I haven't. Neither will he recognize that by clinging to his historical memories, enshrining his traditions of special divine messages and election, (as intolerable a conceit as the pretension of Nordic superiority of Nazi Germany) refusing for centuries to adapt the law of the synagogue to the law of the land he fled to, concentrating on the byzantinism of rabbinical learning, killing, ritualistically, domestic animals, and breeding immoderately, he made himself an out-and-out nuisance in countries where, after all, he had no call to be, and whose internal affairs he always

complicated. Heaven knows that the divergences of even broadly homogeneous nations are harassing enough to handle; the Jew added to them by the invariably discordant note of his stubbornly different outlook, culture and rites. By his own alienness a perpetual thorn in the flesh of instinct-dominated peoples, very slowly and painfully groping towards cohesion and maturity, he clamoured for tolerance in times when not a flicker of it was known or exercised between citizens of the same land. But he does not concede any of these things: the general religious and national intransigence that informed mankind, and the towering difficulty he himself constituted. Always the charge is that obstructions and disasters are heaped on him because of his race, and the consequence of this evasiveness, this lack of psychological honesty is to destroy dignity, reserve, courage, the chance of moral improvement, and to preserve, instead, the most obstinate spiritual vanity that has ever distinguished a people. The unalterableness, through the ages, of all the obvious Jewish characteristics, is due to that convenient martyr-complex which abolishes the necessity—and faculty—for a possibly mortifying self-appraisal, and so roots the human soul in its own defects. I do not denounce the Hebrews for what is usually held against them: their commercialism—it was a defence-mechanism against the military, administrative, social and legal tyranny to which they were subjected in all foreign lands, and besides, when one considers the love of property of the English, the love of savings of the French, the love of hard cash of the Americans, one perceives that the commercialism of the Jews is not so much a love of money as the love and joy of the game: even a farthing is to the good, not because it is a farthing, but because it means winning—but I do denounce them for the invincible and pernicious passion with which they perpetuate the past and block the construction of the future.

Here Philip popped up again.

“Now Philip,” I said hurriedly, “don’t you interfere

between the Jews and me. I've done some plain speaking, which was needed."

"I don't say it wasn't," he remarked. "But amidst the plain speaking you've done some loose thinking. Why did you bring in that *cliché*: the 'obvious characteristics of the Jews'? Who has ever agreed on the obvious characteristics of the Jews? If you summarize the accusations levied against them, you will find they are all contradictory. The Jew is too supple and assimilative. He is too stubborn and unchanging. He is too arrogant, and he is too servile. He is too thrifty, and he is too ostentatious. He is the builder of the financial domination of the world, but he is also the inspirer of Socialism, Communism, and every destructive movement. He is a sordid grabbing money-lender and exploiter, and at the same time a philanthropist and lover and patron of the arts. Which, in this list, are the 'obvious characteristics'? The truth is that there are good Jews and bad Jews, mean Jews and generous Jews, honest Jews and swindling Jews, just as there are Americans, French and English, of the same categories. If you lump all the Jews together, you fall into the Jewish error which you have just been condemning. That is my first criticism. My second criticism is that the picture you drew of Israel, though not unfair, is incomplete. There is another side, which I shall fill in, for none must judge the Jews before remembering it."

And this is what Philip proceeded to say:

"In a world of nations that, from the angle of race, are all made up to-day of mongrels and bastards, the blood and breed of the Jew are about the purest. This is not an argument that will seem of importance to any highly-civilized human being, Gentile or Jew, but it is just as well to mention it, given that Nazi Germany—and now other countries—disgorges such floods of crude, imbecile, and superstitious balderdash about 'Blood and Race.' In the valley of the Tigris and the Euphrates the Semites built one of the greatest civilizations mankind has known, thousands of years before

the 'Aryan' or the 'Nordic' had emerged from the state of a half-beast. A group of this race, the Jews, built in Palestine another civilization while Europe was still steppe and jungle. Centuries before Athens had elaborated the Greek philosophy, the Jews had reached a level of thought where the ram was substituted for the human sacrifice, and law, order and reason for violence and barbarism. 'Thou shalt not kill,' said the Commandments of Jchovah; 'thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not covet, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' That code condemned slavery two thousand years before the Christian era ('he that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to death') though in anno domini 1800 the Christian nations of England and America still had slaves. Indeed, America had them until 1865: a slight anomaly, let us confess. It was the Jews who laid down as a law that the stranger in their land 'should not be vexed nor oppressed,' although this precept, too, has hardly been followed by Christian Europe up to now—and it was the Jewish tradition, embodied in the eternally significant legend of Solomon, that knowledge and wisdom are infinitely more precious to man than riches and power. It was also the Jews who disseminated throughout the world the doctrine that a universal God reigned in place of a primitive tribal deity, and that salvation resided only in love and charity for mankind. All in all, the Jew is entitled to look upon us as savages that his ethic has educated.

"... To the racial civilization of the Jews, immeasurably older than the European and American cultures, must be added all the traditions of a world-civilization. For after the dispersion of the Children of Israel, whenever and wherever a civilization grew, the Jews lived close to it, flung themselves into it as soon as they were allowed to, served it with idealism and ardour. Their enriching participation in the thought, literature, science and art of every country that harboured them, however grudgingly, is indisputable and incalculable.

Among the great men of those nations which have most influenced the evolution of our species, the Jewish names are legion—and always they have stood for the teaching of civilization. More than in any other mind, has been burnt into the mind of the Jews the value of reason, tolerance, and humanity, and it is this bitterly acquired experience which, as a whole, the race presents as its supreme contribution to the advancement of man. If we are to speak of the ‘obvious characteristics’ of the Jews, inexact as the term is, it is obligatory to stress the qualities that made them conceive and carry out the fundamental principles of civilization, quite as strongly as the uninviting traits which developed later in the sombre ghettos of merciless Europe. The detestable manners and the self-pitying martyr-complex that antagonize you are acquired, not essential, parts of the Jewish composition; but their aptitude for progress is inherent in their nature. In any case, it is not by harping zealously on somebody’s shortcomings, and vociferously exposing them, that you will induce good-will and conciliation. Dwell, rather, on proved attributes that deserve respect and admiration, so that the violent and fierce instincts of the Gentiles, on one side, and the long, wrong, mournful, self-defensive, separatist delusions of the Jews on the other, may diminish, until that time comes when we shall weave, as weave we must unless we wish to perish, the common pattern of a freer and happier future. There is no other way, for Israel and for us, to peace.”<sup>1</sup>

“Alas, Philip,” I said with a sigh, “that’s a far-off consummation.”

“You might bring it nearer,” replied Philip briskly, “if you gabbled a bit less about civilization, and practised it a bit more.”

<sup>1</sup> An admirable summing-up of the rôle of the Jews in civilization is to be found in Mr Leonard Woolf’s most impressive book on Fascism and National Socialism, *Quack, Quack*.

## CHAPTER III

### OF THE AMERICAN SYSTEM

#### § I

IT was quite all right to be amused, irritated, always interested by New York, but I had not come to America to react exclusively to a cosmopolitan city. I wanted to know the United States. People told me thousands of times that I could only get to know the United States by travelling through its forty-eight States; if that were impossible, then at least through its great territories, the North-east, the South, the South-west, the West, the Middle West. They were all very different indeed, I was informed. Well, but, they had some common characteristics, hadn't they? After all, America was not Europe: her forty-eight States belonged to the same culture and spoke the same language and were governed by the same Federal laws. It was one tree with many branches. The branches were the regional divergences, but surely the trunk was something in which all the States had a share. After innumerable and interminable questions, discussions and meditations with scores of friends, acquaintances and strangers—for never did there exist a people more willing to help you out of an intellectual dilemma than the Americans, especially when the dilemma concerns their own country, which they recognize is brain-shattering—we agreed that the trunk could be called the American System. So the next step was to find out of what the American System consisted.

Now I had arrived in New York with two dozen or so letters of introduction. Some of them took me to sumptuous houses and to beautiful duplex apartments, mostly on Park

Avenue and in the East Fifties, where the lunches and dinners were gorgeous social functions. When I asked my hosts and their fashionably dressed and richly jewelled guests what the American System was, I was emphatically assured that it was the Glory of America, and without transition, that Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the American President, was betraying, eviscerating, murdering and totally destroying it, like the traitor, liar, madman, dictator and Communist he was. The note of passionate hatred and loathing in these declarations was very startling. These people, who were very kind and hospitable but with whom I could not talk very penetratingly because their basic assumption seemed to be that if a man was poor it was only due to his own deliberate choice, were, I discovered, Republicans. Other letters of introduction took me to smaller flats, in far less elegant parts of the town, where the (excellent) meals were prepared by the mistress of the house and one servant, and where I met men and women who practised the liberal professions, or belonged to an administration, or occupied subordinate but intelligent posts in business. When I asked them what the American System was, I was emphatically assured that it was the Shame of America, and that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was correcting, redressing, modernizing and humanizing it, like the idealist, hero, Liberal, social reformer and protector-of-the-people he was. The note of passionate admiration and enthusiasm in these declarations was very startling. These persons, also very kind and hospitable and much easier to talk to because their horizons were wider and their grasp of current issues greater, were, I discovered, Democrats. I also came across a good many Socialists and Communists, but at that stage of my investigations they did not interest me, for they were doctrinaires, not specific products of the American System I wished to study, and their principles were those of a world-party, not of essentially American parties. The Republicans and the Democrats, on the contrary, formed an inextricable part of



the American System, so I girded up my loins and tackled all three. By looking, conversing, reading and thinking, a picture of them all slowly took shape in my mind. I do not swear it is either a complete or a wholly right picture. What I do swear is that I have checked it with as much intelligence, conscientiousness and honest desire to be fair as my small and faulty brain possesses. And that is the uttermost anyone who is not God Omniscient can do. Moreover, to any and every criticism I shall return this peremptory answer: "Go poke your nose into the American System yourself, and see whether you can give of it a blindingly clear explanation."

## § 2

The American System is a Plant with Two Roots. These two roots are entirely incompatible in their nature, functioning at cross purposes and nourishing the plant with such incredibly different foods that it looks like nothing else on the face of this globe. The Americans are accustomed to it and do not realize what an exceedingly crazy shape, colour and texture it offers to the frightened gaze of the foreigner, but he, poor devil, can't really tell what the hybrid thing represents. The best he can say of it is that on the whole it is constitutionally a Republic, actually a Plutocracy, occasionally governed by Mass Rule, with a slight dash of Dictatorship thrown in from time to time. To complete the confusion, this eerie organism grows in the pot of Democracy.

The first point to analyse is the Roots, and to do that I must go back to 1775, when they started to grow. Everybody, even the Europeans, knows that in 1775 America, then a British colony, broke out into a War of Independence against England, which had shockingly misruled her. The war was conducted by George Washington, who by sheer force of character kept together a disorganized and disunited country, and led to battle a pitifully tiny army to which he

frequently could give neither arms, money, food, remedies, shoes, nor clothing. These poverty-stricken soldiers, who in the terrible icy winter at Valley Forge went undoctored, hungry, ragged, their naked torn feet leaving bloodstains on the ground, triumphed nevertheless, and in 1783 America emerged from the fight as a very weak, very perplexed, economically demoralized, young free nation of almost four million souls.

She had already composed a Declaration of Independence, which stated that all men were created equal, all men had the same political rights, and that Government derived its power uniquely from the consent of the governed. This Declaration took place, I may point out, in 1776, thirteen years before the French Revolution, whose slogan was to be Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. But now she had to devise a Constitution, a Constitution which was obliged to take into account not only the change of status, but the independence of spirit, the enormous release of energies, the unprecedented development of hitherto unconscious powers, that the Revolution had brought into being. The pattern of the world was still monarchical and aristocratic—America might have adopted it, and called in to rule her, as so many European nations had, some foreign princeling or other. She did nothing of the kind. From the outset of her national existence, she started as a Republic, and as the underlying principle of that Republic was that government was of the People, by the People, for the People, she started as a democratic Republic. The political theory was not novel, certainly; the great French and English thinkers had elaborated it already; but America put it into practice for the very first time in the history of mankind.

It is not possible for me to relate the debates of the fifty-five extraordinarily able men who assembled in Philadelphia to frame this Constitution. (When one recalls that they came from a small colonial population in the eighteenth century, and reflects upon the quality and results of their labours,

one gapes, especially when one is a European and remembers the quality and results of the Versailles conferences after the World War, where all the most famous and brilliant European statesmen of the enlightened twentieth century made the most perfect hash of every single question they sat down to settle.) I shall over-simplify at this juncture, because I am not doing an historian's job—though it fascinates me—but must pursue my argument. The Constitution was framed, which is all I can consider here. After it was framed, however, it had to be applied by government, organization and policy. To apply it, George Washington, the first President of the American Republic, chose as his chief advisers two men, Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State, and Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury. And this choice was the origin of the Roots of the American System.

Thomas Jefferson was a Virginian gentleman and land-owner, who lived among, and thoroughly understood, the yeomanry of one of the best and most advanced agricultural sections of America. In that, he was a true "child of the frontier," but at the same time he was a travelled man, a very widely-read student of antiquity, steeped in English Whiggism and deeply influenced by French philosophy. In spirit he was an aristocrat, using the word in its finest sense of integrity, and in convictions he was passionately, unswervingly, almost maniacally democratic. Alexander Hamilton came from the British West Indies; he was presumably illegitimate, son of a French mother and of a Scotch father, and very poor in the beginning of his career. At an early age he showed so much business ability that some kindly people sent him to study law in New York. Brilliant, and with much personal charm, he married into a rich Dutch family and thereafter climbed to the top of the political ladder. Immensely ambitious, self-confident, energetic, with a predisposition towards snobbery and a talent for intrigue, he had one of the greatest practical minds known in history, and superb clarity in the field of finance. Both these men were

statesmen of tremendous importance; both became party leaders and organizers; both shaped the nascent American democracy, with regard to its institutions and mentality, in the most vital and far-reaching manner, but they were utterly irreconcilable antagonists, each representing doctrines and policies so hostile that they were mutually eliminating. The exponents themselves never compromised about their beliefs, they deduced their system of government from them with flawless logic, and they fought for them with the utmost courage and bitterness in the open. Not for a moment did they think that these beliefs could be united bed-fellows, any more than the lion can lie down happily and innocently with the lamb, and their followers, Anti-Federalists with Jefferson and Federalists with Hamilton, made them at first the platforms of two equally strong and violently opposed parties.

What were these sharply defined and conflicting beliefs? Their essence will be found in the two following quotations, which may sound rhetorical and emotional, but which it is not at all unjust to use, for they express the basic theories of the two leaders who uttered them. (*a*) Jefferson said: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." (*b*) Hamilton said: "The People, your People, Sir, is a Great Beast."

Jefferson's major premise was a profound and unflinching faith that the Common Man in America possessed honesty, morality and capacity, and was fit to govern himself. "It is rarely," he said, "that the public sentiment decides immorally or unwisely." From this assumption flows his whole system. Since the Common Man was so honest, moral and able, it followed that the best—the only—safety for the State was the participation of the Common Man in government: therefore, the widest possible extension of the franchise. "It has been thought," he wrote, "that corruption is restrained by confining the right of suffrage to a few of the wealthier of

the people; but it would be much more effectually restrained by an extension of that right *to such numbers as would bid defiance to the means of corruption.*" And again: "The influence over government must be shared among *all* the people. If every individual which composes their mass participates of the ultimate authority, the government will be safe." So he stood for the maximum personal expression of the citizen; for a Federal government whose function was to deal only with foreign nations and such collective acts as the States could not perform alone; for the right of the States to be practically sovereign and independent commonwealths; for freedom of trade, freedom and universality of education, freedom of every man to regulate his own objectives and improvement, provided that in so doing he did not injure his fellows. Foreseeing the possibility, in the future, of the power of wealth, of the development of banking and big industries, of a dominating central government, of a judiciary appointed by the authorities and not elected by the will of the majority, he struggled against them before they even materialized.

But above all, with inexhaustible ardour, he wanted every American to be "free." In his eyes, however, "freedom" did not mean only the possession of abstract political rights, but tangible, literal, concrete independence. So he taught that America should remain an agrarian nation of simple people, of farmers, of small artisans, craftsmen and merchants, assembled in little communities ("I view," he said, "great cities as pestilential to the morals, the health, and the liberties of man: . . . sores upon the body politic"), all having real property or a share in the real means of production. Cheap land was the basis of his political philosophy; small landowners were the most precious portion of the State; luxuries were not to be manufactured by the country itself but imported from abroad in exchange for surplus food. Frugal, wise, and full of rectitude, each man owning his house and soil, assured of the subsistence, clothing and shelter necessary for a comfortable and self-respecting life, with a

magnificent continent boundlessly open before them, which would provide them with a high standard of culture and all-round attainment as well as of material living, the American people were to expand happily and worthily during abundant and dignified centuries. That was Jefferson's conception, called the American Dream. I do not say it was ever entirely realizable, for even while Jefferson was preaching his Arcadia, the country had passed out of the purely agricultural stage and was building up its commerce, industry and finance. (In the end, too, Jefferson himself let it down. His nature was not ruthless enough, nor his mind fanatic enough, to cleave right through the things he hated and extirpate them. When he was President, he showed a divided will and became an empiricist.) Certainly it was never realized. But the supreme and permanent importance of the Dream was that it put into words the ideals, the hopes, the heart's desire of the people. Unspoilt, it caught hold of the American imagination and embedded itself in the American marrow. At times it grew as faint as a mist, at times it glowed like a burning fire. Throughout, it remained the very substance of the foundations of American republicanism, and America must cease to be America if it is destroyed.

So much for the Jeffersonian Root of the American System. Now for the other one, the Hamiltonian. Hamilton had not the slightest confidence in the Common Man. His statements and his acts all bear out his unchangeable conviction that men are only moved by force, by interest and by passion, not by reason or a sense of abstract justice; that the people are turbulent and changing, incapable of judging or determining aright, and that to call their voice the Voice of God was the greatest hoax and imbecility under the moon. On the other hand, he instinctively admired the "rich and the well-born"—this phrase was constantly on his lips—he was persuaded that they alone were fit to rule and check the unsteadiness of the masses, and therefore, if they were given a preponderant share of power and superior privileges, they

could not "receive any advantage by a change and would ever maintain good government"—an assumption, incidentally, quite as lunatic as that of the innate intelligence and virtue of the People. Hamilton said: "It is unquestionable that the people do not possess the discernment and stability necessary for systematic government. . . . The difference between rich and poor indeed consists not in the quantity, but the kind of vices which are incident to the various classes, and here the advantage of character belongs to the wealthy. Their vices are more favourable to the prosperity of the State than those of the indigent, and partake less of moral depravity. . . . Our real disease is democracy."

*That* was his major premise: that the common people were despicable, incompetent and insignificant, and so authority was to be removed as completely as possible from their hands and placed in the hands of those who had, by inheritance or acquisition, wealth and position. His doctrines can be explained partly by the fact that he was an upstart, scorning his social inferiors; an alien, failing to understand the fundamental aspirations of a different country and the democratic tendencies created by two centuries of frontier life; and that his nature was cruel (his defence of the factory system, the killer of overworked women and little children, is one of the most callous documents in literature). But partly the explanation is that with total sincerity he worshipped power, riches, bigness and success. The road to these achievements was the form of industrialism Europe—and England especially—had adopted: exploitation. Therefore exploitation was to be resorted to without hesitation, so that America should play Great Britain's game, and on a much more lavish scale. It is incontestable that he saw what such industrialism would produce in the way of human misery and servitude, but he did not mind—on the contrary, he approved—if only power, riches, bigness and success were attained. As he was as able as he was lucid, he set out deliberately to promote a strong central government

and an influential and effective moneyed class deriving enormous privileges from that government and thus ready to support it in controlling the unprivileged common people. All his financial measures were directed towards that aim with extraordinary skill: the Funding Act, the protective tariff, the establishment of manufactures, banks and shipping not only encouraged industrialism but brought about the dependence of wealth on government favour, tied the rich to the rulers, excluded the poor, created the propertyless wage-earner and the expropriated city-dweller and in the last analysis are directly responsible for the finance-capitalism, the industrial oligarchy, the moneyed interest and the general economy of the United States to-day. It is from his philosophy and his policies that those plutocratic forces spring which are prevailingly evident in twentieth-century America.

I do not deny that Hamilton was honest in his reasoning that since the great bulk of the people would always have to be governed, the more powerful and influential the wealthy were made, the stronger they would be for governing; and that since the best destiny for a nation was to be big, flamboyant, glorious, successful, it was necessary to gather that nation's wealth into a very few hands so that capital expenditures should take place on a scale that a state of small owners could never emulate, and regardless of the pain, the enslavement and the defeat of the weak. But he did not care for humanity and he did not care for equity. He strangled the original material potentialities of the American Republic and frustrated the fundamental spiritual wishes of the American people just as effectively as Napoleon Bonaparte, another ethnical bastard, murdered the French Revolution.

Jefferson and Hamilton have passed, but their principles continue. In their survival and their conflict lies, to my mind, the duality—the tragical duality—of America: her deathless aspiration for democracy, embodied in Jefferson's dream, and her incessant betrayal of democracy, embodied in the fully developed institutions of which Hamilton sowed



the seed, and which have grown, and filled and darkened the American skies. Both doctrines permeate America, and her prodigious incoherence is due to the inconclusive strife between them. When you look at her, you are tempted to think that Hamilton has prevailed; when you hear her speak, you realize that she still hopes in the terms of Jefferson's great fancy. Perhaps the truest statement is "that Hamilton has not triumphed, and that Jefferson has not perished". But none can say at present to which of the two the ultimate victory will go.

I stopped writing with a dreadful sinking of the heart. "Philip, how does all this strike you?" I said with the keenest anxiety.

Philip thought for a little. "Well," he replied judicially, "considering that you've recapitulated historical and psychological facts, mightily aided thereto by the most modern and perspicacious American historians, who know their own stuff superbly, and from whom you lifted quite a number of illuminating reflections, only a mental defective could have gone wrong up to now. But where is that picture of the American System that you made such a fuss about?"

I was infuriated. "Why, blast you, Philip," I cried, "they are my *own* opinions! It just happened that the views of the American historians coincide with mine! Of all the crabbed and cantankerous critics, you take the cake. . . . Besides, I've *done* the American System! Didn't I say that the American System was constitutionally a Republic, actually a Plutocracy, occasionally governed by Mass Rule, with a slight dash of Dictatorship thrown in from time to time?"

"That's no picture," said Philip inexorably. "That's a sally. Anybody can make a sally. You yourself asserted that the American System was a plant with two roots. You've merely analysed the roots: now describe the plant. As I have already had occasion to remark, if you'd only apply the Seat of your Pants. . . ."

But I loathe and detest this indelicate maxim so much

that rather than hear that ponderous Philip reel it off again I hurriedly returned to the work I had thought was so fortunately over.

### § 3

Up to the present, the American Epic has had, I should say, four cycles. No, I'm hanged if I paint them; I never undertook to do so, and even Philip can't oblige me to perform a task I never promised to execute. I'll just mention them, *pour mémoire* . . . The first cycle was that of the European bandits, slaughterers, pillagers and destroyers who explored the American continent, stumbled on the Indians, hanged, shot, hacked, burned, ravaged as much as they could of those native civilizations, generally behaved like cruel savages and treacherous devils, and justified to the full the belief that the European is *le fléau blanc*, the White Scourge. (After several years spent in the European colonies of Africa and Asia, I subscribe whole-heartedly to this opinion.) The second cycle was that of the colonists, from the beginning of the seventeenth century to the latter part of the eighteenth. They settled on the land, put it in agricultural order in their own interests, were completely indifferent to intellectual, scientific and artistic pursuits, but attained to some exceedingly original results in individual character and collective self-government. The third cycle was that of the Republic, which began with the War of Independence, against England, and finished with the Civil War, against the American States of the South. During this period, America broke with Europe, cut herself loose from the habits and institutions and objectives of the Old World, told it to mind its own business, jettisoned a good deal of her ancestral ballast, scrapped many of her inherited traditions, and set out, most audaciously and vigorously, to achieve a culture of her own, which was to incarnate her new conceptions of liberty and equality, of political, economic and spiritual independence

in a land of millions and millions and millions of free acres, open and accessible to every pioneer. Everybody, in every field, was to be given a better chance of happiness than anywhere else or ever before. That, at least, was the idea, and in spite of the queer turns it took, the crudenesses, the disappointments and the failures, it was an excessively sincere, vivid, and active idea, and one of the most interesting experiments the human species has made. The fourth cycle, of which the actual American System is the culminating expression, was that of the Hamiltonian philosophy and policies (that I have explained to you so laboriously; don't listen to Philp's libellous insinuations; I thought the thing out for myself, though of course Mr. and Mrs. Charles Beard, Mr. James Truslow Adams, Mr. Hendrik van Loon, Mr. Herbert Agar, Mr. John Dewey, even Mr. H. G. Wells, who isn't quite as fatuously didactic and wrong-headed about America as he is about everything else under the sun, and several others, gave me magnificent and generous help) running amuck. It was the era of high finance, great industry, and big business—in a word, of supreme Plutocracy, and is still going very, very, *very* strong.<sup>1</sup>

Now it is possible that the Hamiltonian philosophy and policies would not have run amuck so successfully in America if there hadn't been the First Industrial Revolution in the middle of the eighteenth century. We are to-day in the throes of the Second Industrial Revolution, but its effects are only beginning to be felt, so their impact on the American System is not clearly discernible yet. But the First Industrial Revolution did occur, and the Hamiltonian philosophy and policies did run amuck successfully, and there America is.

This social phase started in Europe, with the steam-engine. It was one of the vilest phases our abominable world has ever concocted, and though human nature being what it is,

<sup>1</sup> My advice to every intelligent European who goes over to America for the first time is to read, before he starts, *whatever works* he can find of the Charles Beards and of James Truslow Adams. If he doesn't he will never really understand America. I recommend especially *Our Business Civilization*, by J. T. Adams.

I cannot say that the steam-engine was the only villain of the piece, it certainly was responsible for many of the worst characteristics of that shameful period. As the steam-engine depended upon fuel, it was closely bound to the coal-mine, so that the great industrial centres sprang up near the waterways and the railways by which coal could be most cheaply transported. Industries therefore were not mobile; they had to be confined to certain sites. This led to draining the country of workers, and to the concentration of huge populations in specific towns, with all the attendant evils of overcrowding, promiscuity, slums, filth, poverty, vice and disease. Concentration of industries resulted in the formation of those cancers, Monopolies, which disfigured the face of Democracy out of all recognition. Moreover, the steam-engine could not, and still cannot, generate energy in bulk, and was only able to transmit it to a limited distance by a belt. So every manufacturer had to install his own power plant, which was then his personal property. He was the master, and did with it what he pleased. The consequence was an inordinate development of individualism and the establishment of an economic tyranny practically equivalent to a new slavery. The whole ugly system can be summarized as the "paleotechnic" age of the empirical inventor, the concentrated and rooted industry, the loathsome bloated big city, the subjugation of the worker, and energy, privately owned and privately applied, leading to unrestricted exploitation. It was *laissez faire* rampant—the story of a society drunk with immense external opportunities, exclusively obsessed with economic interests and material trophies, where every man sought his own advantage, rejected responsibility for his fellow-creatures, and victory fell, thanks to the partiality and prejudices of class-governments, to the most powerful and fiercest beast.

As was inevitable, the Industrial Revolution spread to America. There, its typical evils immediately expanded, since America was immeasurably bigger than any European

country. And it acquired some further—and worse—evils due to specifically American conditions. I shall enumerate a few.

(a) There were many more raw materials to be exploited, and in much vaster amounts: coal, iron, silver, gold, lead, tin, oil, natural gas, water-power, forests; so the grabbing was more incessant, and the spoils more tremendous.

(b) A set of bold, violent, relentless, organizing men of an unprecedented kind sprang into existence—the Robber Barons, the Magnates, the Lords of Creation, social pirates and malefactors of the first order, utterly unscrupulous, without a grain of a sense of responsibility towards the community, who by their manœuvres, combinations, speculations, directorates, trusts, monopolies, corners, pools, mergers, holding-companies, factories and banks, and by every illegality, trickery, knavery, treachery and corruption invented by man, obtained control of primary products, railroads, oil, banknotes, gold shares, and established a financial, industrial, economic and social dictatorship over the country which had started with a passionate faith in a common brotherhood.

(c) The American people had founded, by exceptional enterprise, a state out of all proportion to their numerical strength. They had worn themselves out by exploration, pioneering, and wars, particularly by their Civil War, which had left them terrifically reduced and exhausted. They could no longer carry on by themselves the exploitation of the almost unlimited resources of their land. The remnants of the old stock, moreover, were not at all willing to tend to the daily jobs of the farm and the factory. Therefore America looked around for hewers of wood and drawers of water, industrial and agricultural serfs, who could be put to menial uses. She invited all mankind to come and work for her. This self-interested encouragement of wholesale immigration resulted in an influx of many hundreds of thousands of poor, ignorant, low-grade Europeans who flocked to the

United States in the hope of liberty and splendid wages, but were dumped down in hovels, under-paid, under-fed, under-educated, set to heavy manual labour, and who quickly came to form a proletariat hitherto unknown in America, in which class consciousness, class warfare and a reversal of all the old policies were implicit, and which threatens to supplant the ruling Anglo-Saxon element of the Republic.

(d) The political representatives of the people, in the Federal Government and the local bodies, no longer reflected Ideas as at the start (whether they were good or bad, wise or stupid, is beside the point: whatever their value, they were Ideas) but became the plenipotentiaries of particular groups of interests, which they pushed on for all they were worth—or rather, for all the pay they received from their masters was worth—in Congress and the State assemblies. They therefore reduced politics to a state of baseness, venality and immorality that America had never experienced, in which legislatures were no longer for public service but for private sale.

(e) The Iron Monsters, the machines, proliferated and pullulated and covered the ground with their relentless mesh, so that Labour was dehumanized, the larger part of the nation was dependent for its indispensable daily sustenance upon machinery, and man turned into the slave of the servant he had at first only created to assist him in his multitudinous tasks.

(f) A new ideal and a new code got hold of the American people. The ideal was to produce and accumulate as many Inanimate Objects as was possible—the bounds of what was possible being constantly enlarged. The code was Material Success at all and every cost, and by all and every means. Goods were manufactured in countless billions, the factories grew larger, the houses higher, the trains faster, the money deposits vaster, the *per capita* national wealth greater, and every man, woman and child in America wanted and wanted and wanted More, Bigger, and Better Things. Pos-

sessions reigned as the gods of America. People forgot how to think, they forgot how to talk, they forgot how to live, the standards were those of hard cash, the values were those of the dollar, yet the Inanimate Objects went on being piled up, and the worth of the human spirit was estimated by the size of the pile that had been acquired. So much so that when an American President, Theodore Roosevelt, cried out one day with burning bitterness that America was a polyglot boarding-house, a polyglot workshop and a polyglot savings-bank without a soul, he described exactly what his country had transformed itself into.

I do not quarrel with the American System because it is a capitalistic economy. I am a Progressive Liberal, not a Socialist.<sup>1</sup> I loathe the abuses, the waste and disorder of the prevailing systems of capitalism everywhere, and the yoke they have riveted on human life and opportunity, but I do not believe that these evils are as inherent in the nature of capitalism as its adversaries declare. Jefferson's Dream was also based on a capitalistic economy. In his case it was a small-scale capitalism which meant that private ownership of the means of production would be the normal state of almost every man, and go hand in hand with self-government: a combination of economic and political democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Many of my American friends warn me that the term Liberal is not as widely used in the United States as in England, in spite of the fact that the philosophy which it represents finds adherents, under other names, all over the country. Let me define Liberalism very briefly, then, as a school of social thought consisting of those people in all parties who are attempting to make a society based upon private property and private initiative work satisfactorily through the resourceful use of the powers of government—protecting, at the same time, the individual against excessive control exercised by any organized form, business or government, while freedom of conscience, freedom of thought, and freedom of expression are accorded to all. These are the essential and invariable tenets of Liberalism; the modalities, which differ very greatly, bear mainly upon the fashion in which “excessive control by business or by government” is interpreted. I, for example, who am undyingly opposed to Socialism and Communism, hold that nationalization of banks, basic industries and the subsoil, as well as the conservation of national resources, come within the scope of governmental powers. But there are innumerable Liberals, just as sincere as I, who believe that only a close supervision by government is necessary in these fields. Such divergences of opinion are of secondary importance, and leave the fundamental and completely inflexible principles, which I have enumerated, intact.

The greedy and brutal England of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries elaborated another form, which was not inevitably implicit in capitalism, but came to pass because of the fierceness and stupidity of men, and which atrociously degraded her population. There is no guarantee, by the way, that if ever Socialism triumphs, the same human vices will not twist it out of its original conception: we see that happening in Soviet Russia, where there is, besides an autocrat, an oligarchy, and where the community is already most unsocialistically divided into privileged and unprivileged classes from the angle of wages and of power. In any case, capitalism, despite its horrible faults, has been up to now, from the point of view of production, the most fertile régime that was ever invented, while from that same point of view the socialist experiment is appallingly barren, and as the government is the one and only employer, its despotism is absolute and has resulted in the universal enslavement of the people. The European pattern, foisted by Hamilton on America, meant that private ownership of the means of production would be so exceedingly private that scarcely anybody would have any, and it went hand in hand with plutocracy. Hamilton's system outlined, and afterwards completely realized, that unutterably mad and dangerous aspect of big-scale finance-capitalism of which America is now the predominant example: incomprehensible, irresponsible, and ungovernable, rushing away into infinity beyond the control and computations of man, and doubly cannibalistic, for it devours not only others, but itself. It is the antithesis of economic and political democracy. It went to wilder extremes in America than in any other modern country, because the natural resources there were incomparably richer and more numerous; because the people were more audacious, enterprising and energetic; and because for an unconscionably long time the government was on the side of the plunderers. Its corollaries are to-day a huge expropriated mass, vaster, in proportion to the population, than anywhere else,



of insecure wage-earners and insecure job-holders, who possess nothing which is intrinsically their own, neither savings, nor land, nor any sort of means of production, but are wholly dependent for their unstable living on the distant workings of centralized, anonymous and autocratic finance; and a propertyless rural class where destitution and vassalage are so inveterate that to find equivalent conditions one must go to the Balkans. I am alluding here to the tenant farmers, share-croppers and drifting agricultural labourers, whose state, compared with that of the peasantry in Scandinavia, Holland, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, France, is medieval. In some regions, too, many of these people are literally disfranchised, for, to vote, they have to pay a poll tax which they cannot afford. Some politician may pay it for them at election time, so that they shall support him, but then their ballot is as free, in democratic America, as that of the Hitlerized German or the Sovietized Russian. As to political intimidation, it can be so ferocious—in the South, for instance—and the law is so voluntarily blind to it, that whole communities, like the Negroes who are nevertheless American citizens, may be prevented with impunity from expressing their political choice.

It is perfectly true that the famous "standard of living," which is continually dinned into European ears, is the highest the world has known, but the question to be asked here is: how many Americans can keep to its level? My practical experience of life in the United States is that if you have a certain amount of annual income to spend, you will exist on it much more comfortably, smoothly and leisurely in America than in any European country except perhaps Scandinavia, because of the cheapness, diversity and ingenuity of mass-produced articles, and the extraordinary efficiency of "service." Yes. But you must possess that certain amount of annual income. It is an unmitigated and heartless lie to affirm that the consequence of an entire century of finance-capitalism and plutocracy has been a standard of living

which is *universally* higher than the one any nation had dared hope for, or had achieved, in the past. I have on my table a report of the Brookings Institute, which is as conservative as it is intellectually honest, called *America's Capacity to Consume*, and speaking of the peak years, it says:

"At 1929 prices, a family income of \$2,000 may be regarded as sufficient to supply only basic necessities. However accurate this generalization may be, it is significant to note that more than 16,000,000 families, or practically sixty per cent of the total number, were below this standard of expenditure." *In a peak year*, at the height of an unprecedented period of industrial expansion, under Bigger and Better Business than ever before, *almost two-thirds of the total number of families in America could not afford "basic necessities"!* In another passage, I find it stated that during the same era of "boom," there was a standing army of from 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 unemployed. And, to conclude, listen to these figures: in the abnormally prosperous year of 1929, before the Depression, 1,982,000 families had from zero to \$500 income a year, 3,797,000 families had from \$500 to \$1,000 a year, 10,455,000 families had from \$1,000 to \$2,000 a year, 6,639,000 families had from \$2,000 to \$3,500 a year, and the succeeding brackets, from \$5,000 to \$25,000 a year, comprised numbers that declined from one million and a half families to less than half a million. What happened to the standard of living of the majority of Americans when the crash came, and what is happening still, is not pleasant to contemplate. For not only did the American System prove itself economically a god-forsaken liar when it maintained that it had given the whole American people a high standard of living, but in 1930 it toppled over on the American people and would certainly have buried them under its ruins if it had been left to its own devices and recuperating power. It was propped up again by an extraneous agent.

Does all this signify, then, that the American System is

unreservedly wicked and sinister? Beyond doubt, it is worse in its actual manifestations than the equivalent capitalist-democratic systems in the very progressive European countries. It cannot compare with the form capitalist-democracy has taken in Scandinavia; it is inferior to the workings of the same régime in Holland and Switzerland; it ensures far less universal political freedom than in England, and less economic security than in France, where the small middle class has savings and the bulk of the peasants own their fields and house. But the American System has three great merits. *First*, the temper of the people, which is also part of it, despite regional displays of pathological fear and cruelty towards minorities like the Negroes and certain political groups is, in the main, genuinely and profoundly equalitarian: there is no country, I think, where man stands up to speak so directly, simply and fearlessly, to man. *Secondly*, America is classless, in the sense that *a priori* there are no inflexible traditional barriers against social mingling. In practice, naturally, groups are constituted according to interests and education and ideas, but the origins of a person are no hindrance to his admission to any group. *Thirdly*, partly because of this classlessness and partly because of the vastness and resources of America, there are infinitely more chances of individual prosperity there than in the democratic nations of Europe. The time-worn catchword, "every poor man can become a millionaire," is, of course, grotesquely exaggerated, for, as well as chance, aggressiveness, unscrupulousness, ruthlessness and opportunism are imperatively required to make a poor man a millionaire—but up to relatively recent years innumerable ways to fortune did present themselves. With the closing of the Frontier, and especially with the Depression, things changed enormously, and will change even more if Labour victories multiply. But even so, the bounds are elastic. On these three points, the American System at large retains a great superiority, which is instrumental in keeping alive the legend and the hope, if

not the general reality, that America is still, above all others, the land where one can most easily make good.

#### § 4

Before I am through with the American System, I must attend to its vital offshoots, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, particularly as the Europeans, for whose guidance this *chef d'œuvre* is also written, have only the foggiest notions about them. The Republicans and the Democrats are the two principal historical political parties in the United States. They began with Jefferson and Hamilton, and at first were as different as a bird from a fish. Jefferson's party believed, with their intellectual master, that the humble and lowly man was full of natural virtues and could administer his own affairs; that the States should be as independent as possible of a strong central government, and that tariffs, banks and vast industries were the spawn of the Devil and should be eschewed like the Devil by simple right-thinking Americans. They were called Anti-Federalists. Hamilton's party believed in a strong central government conducted by the well-born, the well-bred and the well-to-do, wanted the United States to become the leading manufacturing nation of the globe, took to tariffs, banks and vast industries as a duck takes to water, and called themselves the Federalists. There was good, hard, clear, uncompromising enmity between the two parties, and you couldn't possibly mix them up one with the other.

As time went on, however, the names changed and all sorts of curious subtle things happened to the principles of the two in-the-beginning intransigent parties. The Federalists merged into the Republicans, and the Anti-Federalists into the Democrats. Their High Priests still are Hamilton and Jefferson respectively, and they still call upon their names as the founts of their philosophy and policy. The

Republicans are thus the party of wealth, social conservatism and nationalism, of those who have an established position in the community and a consoling share of the national prosperity. Their *raison d'être* is to aid, not the consumer, but organized production by every available means, and protect it against the encroaching foreigner by an unscalable tariff wall. Their idea of government is that it should put the power of the State at their disposal, and rain upon them all the privileges they require to get richer and richer; and if it is so mean and misguided as not to rain privileges upon them, at least it should keep decently in the background and not handicap or obstruct them when they rush out to collar those resources of the nation which they covet. In a word, they are Big Business, or they support Big Business, or they are reassured by Big Business. They claim that Big Business has incomparably enriched the nation, and the criterion of the value and sagacity of their system is the material success they have themselves obtained.

Do you know, the Republicans, by and large, just bowled me over. Not because of their doctrines: I was acquainted with them. Not because of their absence of brains: they can still produce a few great men. But because of their unfathomable, their irredeemable lack of contact with reality. They move in a world of illusion of which, outside the lunatic asylums, there is no longer the faintest trace in Europe. In this world of theirs, wealth has moral merit; poverty is a deliberate perverseness, is what you go and wallow in for no reason at all save that you like it so much, and out of which you can leap in a jiffy by means of a minimum of search for, and perseverance in, employment. Yes, I tell you, just like that. . . . If you'd only whistle, say in effect the Republicans, real work and excellent wages would come trotting out of the void; since you are poor, it is evident that you won't even take the trouble to whistle, so it is all your very great and abominable fault, and though the charities may succour you, all good Republi-

cans very properly despise you, and the State mustn't touch you with a pair of tongs, lest it should encourage you in your un-American iniquity. The boom years before the crash were not, as the new-fangled (also un-American) economists say, a monstrosity, a morbid tumour, but a sane and healthy normality, such as the American System would always represent if it weren't malignantly interfered with; and if only that fiend in the White House could be lugged out of it and sent spinning, *laissez faire*, the magic quintessence of the American System, would infallibly re-create the Age of Gold. Not for nothing, as you see, are the Republicans dubbed "the Bourbons."

As America did expand colossally during the last seventy years, and as with wealth goes conservative thought and no one save idealist cranks wants a change when money is flowing, the Republican party remained continuously in office for a long time. It recruits its rank and file mainly through arguments of self-interest, but racially it is chiefly composed of Anglo-Saxon and Nordic elements, in the small towns where families have roots and a background, where the Protestant traditions and ethics endure, devotion to the old legends is heart-felt, and memories of the past are persistent. The North-east generally, except for the huge cities, where the industrialized proletariat is naturally an antagonistic factor, has a most solid Republican basis, as have the States strongly influenced by earlier migrations from New England. The North-west, colonized by fully assimilated foreigners like the Scandinavians and Germans, who made good and immediately turned to the Party that shelters the successful, belongs body and soul to the Republicans, though periodically it bursts out into amazingly advanced spurts of thought and is the home of those "radical," obstinate, rebellious, sometimes mystical movements like the Farmer-Labour Party, the Non-Partisan League, Senator La Follette's Party, the Progressives under Theodore Roosevelt. Their politics are intermittent and explosive, not really revolutionary, but

usually founded on the perpetual grievance the farmers have against Capital with a big "C"—Wall Street particularly—which they feel is trying to strangle them; in any case, they are too wilful and heterogeneous to form a stable Third Party, and I should say that their principal value consists in the individualistic ferment they represent, which shakes up the hidebound conservatism of the Republicans from time to time. The States of the Pacific Coast also carry the Republican label, in spite of their incessantly restless efforts to start all sorts of parties.

To resume, therefore, the Republicans are the inheritors of those classes created by Hamilton with great and special privileges, so that they should support the government and control the common people. Persistently indeed did they hang on to those privileges and support only the governments that were like wax in their hands! In their stupendous grabbing egotism they are quite logical. Where they are not logical is that, thoroughly practising all Hamilton's doctrines, they go and steal Jefferson's pivotal theory and proclaim *urbi et orbi* to the common people that the common people are, not a Great Beast, as they are bound by Hamiltonian tenets to declare, but the source of all nobility, wisdom, and political discernment. This is especially evident at election time, but even between whiles the Republicans manage to mix up Hamiltonian practice and Jeffersonian theory with a flabbergasting deceitfulness. To the intellectual hostility they rouse in me because of false economic, and unjust social, concepts, is thus added moral indignation, for the hypocrisy involved in assuring a Great Beast that it is a King Solomon is really more than I can stomach.

"Are the Democrats more to your taste?" you will perhaps ask. Well, they are no great shakes either. Their premises being Jeffersonian, presumably they do not lie to the People when they inform it that it possesses quasi-divine attributes. But they too twisted their doctrine. Indeed they twisted it so much that I'm blessed if one can recognize its original

shape. Certainly they display no incandescent desire to "reduce the functions of government and bring it down to that wise and frugal affair" that their leader visioned. They tend to pile up bureaus and controls and supervisions and official interferences. They fought the tariff about as effectively as a minute-ago-born mouse fights a big rampageous tom-cat. Now and then they emitted a squeak of protest against monopolies and trusts and corporations, and the legal and social despotism of the plutocrats, but immediately after they fell headlong into coma. They always lacked constructive unity, for as they were out traditionally to champion the individual against the State, and the State against the Federal government, they represented a continually changing "coalition of discontent," the reaction of threatened minorities and dissatisfied local communities, and their rôle was that of an opposition, not of a militant unit. I cannot see that they ever had a real centre of gravity. When, pretty rarely, they came into office, it was less because of their specific programme or merits than because there was temporarily, in the public, an explosion of wrath against the Republicans, who were failing to keep their flamboyant promises of national prosperity. But when, thanks to circumstances, the Republicans did keep those promises, the Democrats could hardly get a peep-in.

Practically, the Party draws its recruits from the malcontents in every section who consider themselves to be oppressed: the South as against the North, the Western farmers as against the Eastern capitalists, the enormous cosmopolitan towns as against native Protestantism and culture, the new immigrants, uprooted, bewildered, too alien yet for assimilation, as against the population that has ancestry and security. Tammany comes in here, though the indications actually are that at long last its influence is declining. Tammany is one of the foulest political institutions in the United States, which is saying a lot: it propagates and thrives upon an indescribable corruption, and has besmirched the



Democratic Party irretrievably. For several decades its power was unbeatable, principally because of its hold on those foreigners who were poor, ignorant, and friendless, for whom human kindness meant everything and who neither understood nor cared about political morality in an unfamiliar country where they had as yet no niche. Tammany protected them as soon as they arrived, giving them sympathetic advice and material assistance, and of course got their fervently grateful votes in return. Late in 1937, however, during the New York mayoral elections, Tammany was whipped for the first time in its existence, and turned from a roaring tiger, its hitherto invariable aspect, into a wet and mangy cat. It is ardently to be hoped, by all who have at heart America's honour, that this astoundingly rapid metamorphosis will prove permanent. Incidentally the latter shows how quickly and triumphantly civic reforms can be put through in the nation when the upright citizens take a hand in the game. It can never be said too often and too emphatically that the scandalous and legendary dishonesty rife in public affairs is often due, not to the preponderance of rascals and ruffians in America, but to the fact that the majority of clean-minded citizens look upon politics as such a filthy business that they cannot be induced to touch it even with a pole. The result of this most reprehensible fastidiousness is that the crooks are the headmen in the show.

But from the angle of an idealistic philosophy, the Democratic Party has much less coherence than the Republicans, and in spite of its "principles" of liberty and tolerance, it resorts to violence at a moment's notice. In the solidly faithful South, for instance, where the Anglo-Scottish origin of the race is purer than anywhere else, you find fanatical Fundamentalism—remember the Monkey Trial in Tennessee?—the bigoted and superstitious Bible Belt, oppression of the Negro, hatred of foreign elements and persecution of "radicalism." In the region where Jeffersonism receives most lip-service flourish the Ku Klux Klan, the Baptist and

Methodist opposition to evolution, Prohibition, the tarring and feathering, and also the murdering, of socialists, communists and union organizers—everything that is most contrary to those rights of the individual and that independence of thought which the historic founder of the Party so zealously upheld. In the East the Party is dominated by the Irish politician and permeated by Roman Catholic influence—agents that are not precisely conducive to Liberalism anywhere. On the surface the Democratic mission is still to champion the individual against the strong organized economic interests, the consumer against the producer, the common people against the trusts; and the rallying cry is still a low cost of living, a reduction in the tariff, and free competition which will benefit the masses. But in effect action is only demagogic; the Vested Interests and Big Business have always come to an understanding with the Democrats and there never was an instance when, in spite of the apparent vigour of their agitation and the noisiness of their slogans, they overturned anything in the least fundamental in the System. Theoretically vastly more equitable, humane, and modern-minded than the Republicans, the medley of their racial ingredients, dissident regional factions, contradictory local objectives, and their own opportunism and cowardice rendered them in effect more bemuddled, befogged and incompetent than their rivals—at least until Franklin Roosevelt came to the throne.

As to the other political parties which exist actually in the United States, there are, as in every democracy, the Socialists and the Communists, whose numbers are indisputably feeble outside the industrialized centres, but whose activities are extremely energetic and whose educational influence is incontestably vital and spreading. There are also, as has always been the rule in America, a heap of movements, of cranks, of Messiahs, of would-be dictators, who jump suddenly into the limelight, agitate, preach, bawl, brawl, are enthusiastically followed for a certain period, and peter out

and disappear. During my stay in the country, I myself saw quite a few wax and wane with equal abruptness. But the preservation or the legislative modification of the American System is, as yet, completely beyond their reach, so for the purposes of this *exposé* they need not be taken into account.

## § 5

For fifty years or so the Democrats had very bad political luck and were kept out of office (chiefly because the country was prosperous. I repeat that it seems to be an unwritten law that in periods of wealth the Republicans take the helm, and in periods of distress the pendulum swings back to the Opposition and the Democrats are elected). True, they got a break with the nomination of Woodrow Wilson to the Presidency in 1912, but as we all know, alas and alack, at the end of the World War public opinion wearied of his lofty but congealed idealism and his Party lost ground. After him came again a succession of Republicans: the spineless Harding, whose Administration was putrid even for America; the honest but dull, mediocre, ungenerous Coolidge, who, by always saying nuffin, never quite let on how stupid he was; and Herbert Hoover, under whom occurred the unparalleled Depression of 1929—a financial, economic and moral shattering such as the American people had never known before. Back the appalled country reverted to the Democrats and in 1932 put Franklin Delano Roosevelt into the White House.

Now I shall embark upon a brief lesson in Current History. The Americans know the matter by heart, but comparatively few Europeans have more than some dim notions concerning it, so they must listen to me carefully because the events I am setting forth led to a stupendous, an awe-inspiring, an unbelievable novelty: the American people began to *Think*. Let me add at once, however, that I have not the remotest intention of explaining all the causes and all the facets of

this redoubtable mental revolution, for the very good reason that they are so numerous and so technical that no layman—that is, I as well as you—can understand them entirely. But here is, *grosso modo*, what happened.

Round about 1920 America found herself launched on a wave of prosperity that made everybody, even the Americans, gasp. (a) During the World War, fighting Europe had clamoured incessantly and despairingly for the food she herself could not raise. After the World War, blood-drained and broken down, she took so much time to get going again that her necessity continued for years and years. So the American farmers bought all the land they could, borrowing all over the place at eight to ten per cent interest to do so, and they sowed it and produced unlimited crops for export to the still stricken and paralysed continent. (b) The factories manufactured and manufactured and manufactured, and in all the great industries the workers received undreamt-of wages. (c) Everybody, from the millionaire to the street-sweeper—for it is in the bones of the Americans to gamble and venture and take quick, extreme, irrational chances—played on the Stock Exchange in such a way that stocks and shares rose to ten, twenty, fifty times their original price. Great and small bought boundlessly beyond their possible means of payment. (d) The country plunged headlong into an orgy of speculation in real estate. High-pressure salesmen, yelling and wheedling and hypnotizing, promising magic developments and princely fortunes, sold land on credit to millions of foolish souls who had never clapped eyes on the property they acquired. Buildings that had just been completed were demolished in order to erect bigger and dearer ones, the entrepreneurs borrowing the money for the construction and the tenants mortgaging their residences before they even moved in. (e) The bankers became the Scientists, the Philosophers, the Intellectuals, and the Heroes of the nation; and the loud-voiced, strong-jawed, bull-necked captains of industry, its Oracles. America lifted herself from

earth and soared towards ever-unfolding vistas of opulence and paradise on paradise of material comforts and delights.

It was all extraordinarily agreeable, flattering, exciting, and extraordinarily mad. Everything hummed and zipped and ripped and boomed, and the people became wealthier and more self-assured and more ambitious and more vain-glorious and more senseless every day—and we saw them in all their splendour and vanity and lunacy in Europe, squandering their money with as much prodigality as irresponsibility and crass bad taste. Under the agis of Herbert Hoover, the Great Engineer, the President of Prosperity, the pace became faster and furiously. Never had America been so extravagant, megalomaniacal and boastful, and never had she thought or scrutinized so little, or asked herself less where she was going. She was going towards the most formidable sock-on-the-jaw in her history, and one or two John-the-Baptists told her so, but the Americans can be deafier than the Jews. Herbert Hoover urged her to get richer and richer, and Al Smith, a popular Governor of New York, informed the world that his fellow-countrymen never carried umbrellas, their aim being to live under an Eternal Sun. With such vulgar and idiotic encouragements for her main winds, on and on into no one knew what, America, all canvas bombastically spread, magnificently and crazily sailed.

Then the Economic Gods looked at her, shook their heads, judged that she really had gone the limit, and put their flat and heavy foot implacably down.

The tragedy started on October 19th, 1929, when the ticker on the Stock Exchange showed numbers galloping past like armies flying in panic. Five million shares changed hands, each losing from five to forty points. "Ridiculous alarm," said the intelligent, far-seeing bankers. "The crisis will be over in sixty days," said the all-wise Hoover. "Prosperity awaits us at the next turning. Buy Now." But the prices heeded neither the intelligent far-seeing bankers, nor the all-wise Hoover. Down and down they dived to the

bottom of an unfathomable abyss. (From 250, United States Steel crashed to 22 : you can take that as an example of the sliding scale of values.) The whole insane system had rested primarily on the false declarations of pseudo-financial specialists and the blind acceptance of ignorant masses ; on unsubstantial hopes, not on facts. It had shot up because of an uncritical faith which examined nothing. The moment examination began, the wild surge of faith wavered and sank. Unjustified confidence had built the structure : sudden distrust destroyed it. A universal disruption set in.

(a) The investing classes found that their investments were worth just about, or at best a bit more than, the paper on which their titles were printed, for though they had never realized it, their capital had been, not money, but credit. Credit having vanished, their capital was no more. Result : hundreds of thousands of middle-class families literally ruined.

(b) Industries, equipped for gigantic outputs, found no consumers for their products, closed down temporarily or failed entirely. Result : millions of workers unemployed.

(c) The farmers, who had believed that the markets of the world would absorb their crops for ever and ever, and had in this belief contracted large debts to buy land and agricultural machinery, found themselves faced with an enormous super-production, no outlets, and vertiginously decreasing prices for their goods. But their fixed charges, taxes and the interest on their debts, remained exactly the same. The banks and lending societies which had so blithely advanced them money during the boom, frightened now by their insolvency, pressed them for immediate reimbursement or, in default, seized their fields, their cattle, their houses—whatever they could. Result : millions of people deprived of their homes or of the implements and beasts necessary to their livelihood. Further result : a movement of violent active anger against the State, which not only did not help them, but aggravated their misery by legal penalties

and forced sales. For the American farmers bear no resemblance to the passive semi-feudal rural classes in England, or to the patient accustomed-to-be-neglected peasants of France: they look upon themselves as the real founders and supporters of the American Republic, and are proud of their past and their political and religious power. Again and again, in the Middle West especially, the irate farmers assaulted the judges, forcibly drove away the bidders who were strangers, bought up the auctioneered farms for cents instead of dollars ("penny sales"), and restored them to the owners; and cut off towns from supplies of milk and other products so as to oblige the urban inhabitants to accede to their demands.

(d) Because neither the loans on real estate, nor the interest on these loans, could be paid, thousands of local banks failed. Because the big bankers, money being so flush, had lent (dementedly) billions of dollars to South America and Germany, where by now their credits were blocked and frozen, Wall Street gave terrifying signs of collapse and scandal after scandal broke out. Result: the investing public lost all reason. It drew out what remained of its capital from the tottering banks, thus increasing the number and gravity of failures, and an explicable but calamitous hiding of gold took place all over the country. In Baltimore alone, the depositors carried off six million dollars a day. Twenty-two States suspended payments. The Municipalities, which had derived their principal revenues from taxes on real estate, got no taxes now that real estate yielded nothing: empty-handed, they docked the salaries of their employees. States and Municipalities alike became totally incapable of supporting the unemployed—and in 1932 there was anything from eighteen to twenty million Americans without any resources, who needed to be fed and clothed and sheltered daily by somebody or something if they were not to lie down and die.

"Mercy! Whatever was the Hoover Government about?"

you will exclaim if you are not an American. The Americans don't need to inquire. I can tell you instantaneously. It sat and twirled its thumbs while disaster piled on disaster. From 1929 to the end of 1930, it simply refused to admit the extent and seriousness of the crisis, which it declared to be just another of those "cyclical" depressions which the American System, so dear to its Republican heart, engendered and weathered. Nor would it admit the existence of the unemployed, for there again it was saturated with the Republican mentality that never liked the poor, attributing their state to their own choice. The ruined, the workless, the indigents, just hadn't the right to be there. It ignored them, bag and baggage. In 1930, however, it grudgingly had to recognize that people were positively starving, so it went as far as to say: "God forbid that the Government should interfere! On no account or pretext must we fall into the monstrous English error of distributing relief. If Americans are depraved enough to be destitute, let the private charities help them."

Then began that dreadful era of apple-selling in the streets, of waiting in the interminable bread-lines, of the clearing-houses, the aid-centres, the refuges, the improvised organizations directed by social workers or mere volunteers, the impotent efforts of local institutions, the wave of "white-collar" unemployed, architects, lawyers, engineers, professors, doctors, who by this time had used up their savings, sold their insurance policies, and had not a nickel left between themselves and death from inanition and exposure. Still the Hoover Administration kept dumb and numb as the grave, while the whole of America, under its bleak blank eyes, agonized vainly. When the term of the "President of Prosperity" expired in November 1932, the farmers, the industrial workers, the unemployed were on the verge of insurrection. The Hoover régime crashed vertically under a blast of fury and execration from them all, and the new Democratic President was inaugurated to the accompaniment of an



incipient rural revolt, smashed banks, comatose industries, the falling pillars of a wrecked social system, and a national clamour of despair. No American statesman, not even Washington, had ascended to power in such dramatic circumstances, and Franklin Roosevelt, gazing at the devastation, pronounced a condemnation and made a promise. He said: "The money-changers have fled; they have abandoned their high seats in the temple of our civilization. Now we will dedicate this temple afresh to the service of our ancient truths." Drowning America clutched at him: it was Roosevelt; or Nothingness; or Revolution.

## § 6

After I had settled in my mind the vexed question of the American System, the intricate question of the mentality and policies of the Republicans and the Democrats, and the sorrowful question of the Depression, I felt that I was logically bound to settle the controversial question of Franklin Roosevelt. Very quickly I decided that I could not do so in New York. New York is brightly talkative, but it is also very parochial, very vain, very engrossed in its own affairs, and persuaded that it is all that matters in America. Therein it suffers from delusions. It knows a great many things about the United States and repeats them with terrific volubility, but as it has both an impish pugnacity and a superiority complex, all it says is considerably askew, considerably distorted, pervaded by aggressiveness and conceit. It sets you wrong from the very beginning, and I, for one, had an awful lot of trouble, later, uprooting from my mind what New York had told me about the rest of America. Besides, the city was all het up on the subject of Franklin Roosevelt; as I've mentioned already, his partisans and his adversaries were equally violent, and neither camp could help me to form an impartial opinion. So I resolved to transfer myself

to Washington, the brain and heart of Franklin Roosevelt's administration, where I would see nakedly, directly and personally, what he had done, was doing, and meant to do. I drove to an unbelievably vast and superb railway station in New York, where I found everything under the sun except trains, and I had to trudge miles and miles till I unearthed one tucked away in a corner. After that laborious discovery, I travelled in an endlessly long day-coach, overrun by undisciplined children, where nobody talked to me, nobody offered me anything—contrary to what happens in dirty, loquacious and sociable third-class in Europe—and where I wasn't allowed to smoke, through an unmitigatedly hideous and untidy countryside. It took me five hours to get to Washington, though the distance is only two hundred miles, and I wish someone would explain to me why, in this speed-mad country, the trains make a point of crawling from the metropolis to the political capital of America at a pace that a wheelbarrow could (almost) beat.

Right here I laid down my pencil. For some time past, I had been assailed by very painful misgivings, and now they came to a head. I do not know whether I am a magnet for disasters, but somehow I can never be long at peace.

"Philip," I said wistfully, "d'you remember that recently I wrote a little book on the English?"

"I do," answered Philip. "You never let anyone forget it."

That's a downright thumping lie, because as authors go, I am quite modest. I've lived among authors for the best part of my existence, and I ought to know. Take it from me, they are *insufferable* creatures, while beyond being certain that I am Always Right, I have no vanity to speak of. But since Philip wilfully chooses to be blind to my merits, I will not demean myself by arguing with him. I continued:

"It was a successful little book."

"Some people said so."

"Nothing of the kind!" I exclaimed angrily, and instantly realized that he had got me confused. "My God, Philip, won't somebody ever choke you! I mean, of course, that it was not successful because people said so; it just *was* successful · so there. But the idea I am trying to get across, if only you'd stop tripping me up so maliciously, is that it was successful because it was funny."

"Well?"

"Can't you see? If I'm funny again, I'll be successful again."

"So what?"

"But I can't write the same sort of book on America! She doesn't strike me that way."

"Then you must write your book on the way she strikes you."

"Yes, but, it isn't funny."

"Well?"

"Well, since it isn't funny, the inference is that it won't be successful."

"What has that to do with the matter?" inquired Philip.

"But I'd *like* it to be successful, Philip! Success means royalties—though those two scallywags, the American and British Governments, filch twenty-five per cent of my royalties from me—and that house of mine in France simply LAPS up money. Its roofs are falling in, its walls are falling down, and it needs a new coat of paint. Perhaps I had better start this book on America all over again."

"Why?"

"To make it funny."

"You've just this moment stated that America does not strike you as funny."

"She doesn't, but . . ."

"I am quite unable to understand what you are driving at," said Philip with sudden and extreme coldness. "This conversation is only a waste of time. Get back to your work and continue to write on America according to how she

strikes you. There is nothing else an honest mind can do."

When Philip takes that tone it is useless to try to make him see sense. Especially as my pig-headed conscience was also on his side. But it really is very hard on me, and for once I am exceedingly sorry for myself. Loads and loads of people go to America and turn out books merely on the traits that lend themselves to amusing dissertations. It is superlatively easy to laugh at America, not only because her exaggerations and absurdities are more abundant, boisterous and enormous than perhaps any other people's, but because she has, *en masse*, a spontaneousness and simplicity that render them immediately obvious. None of the American foibles or faults is concealed. They'd hit even a blind man in the eye. Naturally I perceived them, too, and felt that I could turn them to account. But from the moment I landed in the United States, something caught me by the throat, and it has never let me go. It has spoilt for good and all my chances of being witty—quite legitimately—at America's expense. The absurdities were there; the vulgarities; the irrelevancies. But the point is that they do not matter. They are like a colony of ants running about on the toes of a giant. What mattered from the first was the significance of America. From the very first I saw her as stupendous, chaotic, immature, but potential above every country on the face of our globe. From the very first I was convinced that there will be a phase where she will impose her direction on the world's affairs, shape the destinies of the human race, and become the most powerful and important exponent of Occidental civilization. If in the beginning this unfaltering conviction was only intuitive, as I studied America it grew into a belief founded on knowledge and reason. To my mind, it is in her that our future reposes, and that vision of her redoubtable rôle wiped everything else out of the picture. What interests me supremely in America is the assets, qualities and tendencies that will both help and hinder her

in the accomplishment of what I think is her mission. From the angle I regard her, she can inspire me, encourage me, alarm me, and infuriate me—but she cannot amuse me. I am incapable of being humorous when I am in earnest, and unfortunately America has called out every ounce of earnestness I possess. So, much to my chagrin and the detriment of my literary and financial interests, I find it impossible to play with America as I did with England, and this book will be, not a skit, but, within the bounds of my aptitudes, an exposition and an analysis of the community that circumstances will compel to take the lead. The perfectly unexhilarating approbation of the chilly priggish Philip and of my strait-laced ungenial Huguenot conscience must be, damn it, my sole reward.

## CHAPTER IV

OF THE POLITICAL CAPITAL: WASHINGTON, THE NEW DEAL,  
AND FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT

### § 1

LATE in an exquisite spring evening, I emerged from the Union Station in Washington. Immediately I opened my mouth and gave a great cry. Every organ, every nerve in my body expanded, lightened, mounted, and floated. Such swift rapture bore me up that I became aerial. For around me there was Space.

If I returned to it to-day, knowing it as I now do, perhaps Washington would not enthrall me in exactly the same fashion. But on that spring evening it spelt a beauty which it moves me still to remember. Friends were waiting for me; they put me in their car, and drove me slowly through the strangely empty streets. Low, wide and tranquil, the city stretched endlessly in front and on both sides of me, like a plain. Under the smooth and limpid sky, nothing clanged or rattled or quivered; there were no blasts, no volleys and discharges of electricity; no snarl and tangle of telegraph wires or poles cut into the mother-of-pearl firmament. I saw vast avenues and drives, great formal vistas, an infinitude of plazas with satiny grass, trees in lines and plots and woods—more trees than anywhere save the countryside—long rows of large, white, handsome buildings, a broad calm river, gardens of enchantment near the water, where leaves and blossoms were unfolding their delicate perfumed panoply. Was this really a town in America? A medley of recollections passed through my mind: the marble luxury of ancient villas, the massive dignity of classical palaces, the planned

decorativeness of Paris, and old rich parks in England. The free living plants, the waters, and the unenclosed spaces gave it a garment of grace; the stable mansions an air of assurance, as if its way were appointed, its energies canalized and directed, its objectives lofty and remote. Silent, immobile, concerted, Washington gave me the impression of forces gathered mightily together, and propelled forward, not in a roar, a rush, or an attack, as in New York, but in a slow irresistible march covering the country. Perhaps the Lincoln Memorial had something to do with this feeling. It is erected, separate and apart, at one end of an immense straight vista. They took me there that first night so that I should see it floodlit; it is open, like a Greek temple, low, admirably proportioned and flawlessly plain. Alone, steadfast, almost unbearably expressive, the powerful melancholy figure of Lincoln is seated in a perfect, pillared hall, and the quiet noble words he had uttered when living, unadorned, unembossed, terrifically simple, are inscribed in black on the level white walls. I cannot remember, in an existence embittered by having to look at statues, a piece of sculpture that awakened in me such poignant emotion. I did not think of history; I did not think of America; but as I gazed at the sad, ugly, magnificently thought-shaped face of the murdered President, a wave of pride and gratitude surged up in me, that the species of which I am has left so far behind it the beast as to produce that dedicated man.

## § 2

During the extraordinarily happy weeks I spent in Washington, I found that its initial bewitchment never varied, for it derives from just those things one perceives on one's arrival: the amplitude of the layout, the beautiful expanses, the light firmament, the low soothing skyline, the countless lovely trees, the picturesque parks. The original plan of the city, pre-

pared by Major Pierre L'Enfant, was a masterpiece of landscape architecture, and in the main it has been preserved. From the Capitol and the White House radiate long broad avenues: where they intersect there is a circle and a statue, where a street cuts athwart them there is a green silky piece of sward; and from the Lincoln Memorial to the Capitol runs a superb park-way, the Mall, with gardens, pools, cypresses, and the tall white obelisk America erected to George Washington. At every step, almost, you meet history, commemorated with dignity, or a ravishing bit of nature. The town is replete with monuments; it is one of the leading educational centres of the United States, and overflows with universities, colleges, institutions, learned societies, museums and art galleries. It is full, too, of sumptuous buildings. And that's where the snag lies.

I'll tell you what happened to Washington. One day it suddenly sat up and said: "Beyond any kind of reasonable doubt, I am soon going to become the Most Important Capital in the World. Now for the Most Important Capital in the World, what's the best symbol? Obviously, all the things that are the oldest, the vastest, the most imposing and the most splendid in history. In my youth I heard lots and lots about the Beauty that was Greece, and the Glory that was Rome. So back I goes to Greece and Rome for my essential symbols, but as the way back to the past is long and winding, and a few other masterpieces did crop up here and there on the road, I may unbend so far as to pick up one or two suggestions from Colonial America, the French eighteenth-century, and even the Renaissance. But, mark you, that is only an act of condescension and if—which God forbid!—I ever forget myself and stray into the modern, I'll scrap it *pronto*. Every day and in every way, I shall be more sublimely Classical-Tradition than the Classical-Tradition itself." The trouble with Washington is that it lives up to its own persona.

It constructed the hugest, whitest and costliest edifices



that any government possesses to-day, beginning with the Capitol, set on the brow of a little hill. The Capitol is spoilt by a horrible bloated dome squashing its rotunda and reminding one, facetiously, of a colossally dingy Turkish bath, but its Corinthian columns, its porticos and gigantic groups of statuary make the rest of it ponderously impressive. Inside, it is perplexing, like a warren: the corridors are labyrinthine, the historic parts are small and homely, the ornamentation indifferent, the atmosphere informal to the point of casualness. An amusing little one-wheeled underground train whizzes to and fro all the time, taking you to the offices of the Senators, who have sets of three or four rooms, according to their importance, crowded with suppliants. When Congress is in session, the debates are as diverting as an entertainment. It is extremely easy to get into the House or the Senate; you sit in a vast and very comfortably arranged gallery, in a cheerful, colourful, well-lighted hall and look down, with the greatest enjoyment, upon a sort of highly animated bear-garden. There is no more pomp or order than in a friendly untidy business club. The Representatives read, write, engage in private conversations, put their feet up on their desks, stroll about as the fancy takes them; messenger boys run ceaselessly hither and thither with papers and notes; everybody interrupts everybody else; the Speaker uses his gavel as though it were a truncheon, and no one pays him the slightest attention. The effect of happy-go-luckiness is such that it is difficult to believe the discussions are serious, and the delightfully helpful attendants add to this feeling of levity by their exceedingly irreverent comments: constant association with Congressmen seems to have worn away the bump that makes for respect. Then there is the Library of Congress, a handsome building in the Italian Renaissance style, with a flat black copper roof, gilded panels and very elaborate decorations—one of the most magnificently equipped and admirably run libraries in the world. Then there is the Treasury Building, massively Ionic; and

the State, War and Navy Departments Building, massively old-fashioned and fussy, the only administration where etiquette is (very mildly) observed; and the new Supreme Court Building, massively Doric, and beautiful both inside and out. I crawled like a hypnotized ant through its pure, glacial, glittering expanses of white and gold; such dazzling stretches of cold and perfect pulchritude I had never seen nor dreamt of, and at last they congealed me, and the guards picked me up and revived me in one of the small ravishing courts where the Justices go to meditate. America spent an immense sum of money to spin this gorgeous marble cocoon round her Nine Little Black Old Men, but I was told that they prefer their old shabby quarters to their palatial offices, and even to their courtroom—a great cube with marble pillars, crimson velvet curtains, austere decorations on the walls, where the Judges sit against a background of immaculate white, behind a long plain table, amidst the dead silence of the public, like black busts. No spectator is allowed to take notes, and the whole thing reminded me, on an incomparably more opulent scale, of the Presbyterian chapel where I, too, once upon a time, was taught the Awfulness of the Law. Then there are the scores of the recently constructed Administration buildings, such as the Department of Commerce, the Department of Justice, the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Labour, and in them and by them Washington reaches the apex of its determined dream. In size and in number, they are the dominating architectural feature of the city, and, awesomely Roman or elegantly Hellenistic, they put the finishing touches to its vision of antique grandeur.

All the young American architects I met in Washington indignantly declared that the vision is atrocious. "Here we are," they cried, "with imagination, vigour, and talent, and Washington sweeps us contemptuously aside and reverts to conventions we thought mortally boring even when we were in our schools." It is possible that if I were a young American

architect, I also would be furious ; but as I am not, I cannot agree with their verdict, though I sympathize with their sense of frustration. No buildings that are as stately and finely-dimensioned as the Departments can be anything but an adornment to a town, whatever young architects say. I fervently wish we had them in Europe. Not only did their serene façades seem to me more restful than our tortured Gothic, always recalling a dark, complicated and imperative religion, but their interiors filled me with seething, stark yellow envy. When one thinks of the dirt and smelliness of the government bureaus in France, and the crampedness and dreariness of those in England, the spectacle presented by the Departments is uplifting, morally as well as aesthetically. Lovely halls, patios, fountains and flowers; bright corridors and walls (many of them hung, like museum galleries, with original and interesting paintings from the Works Progress Administration, artists on relief working for the State). . . . Large, clean, air-conditioned, well-heated rooms with polished desks and proper lights, charts, graphs, amusingly educative posters, excellent pamphlets which you can carry away. . . . Swift lifts, impeccable washrooms, all the modern decencies and conveniences. . . . I would have gone to work in those offices for the pure joy of it. Never did a government care for the comfort and hygiene of its employees with such solicitude, and never were there staffs which show such a forthcoming attitude to the public, or take such infinite pains that it should see and understand.

It is sheer beatitude to visit an American administration. No European, unless he has had that experience personally, can have the faintest notion of the courtesy and kindness, the miraculous patience, of American officials, big and small. If you want to learn, they will receive you, whoever you are. The door-keeper at the White House asks you pleasantly: "How do you do?"; the head of a titanic organization like Relief urges you cordially to "Come right in." You do go right in, and draw out a cigarette,

and fall into a discussion about the methods and results of his terrifically complicated bureau. You can formulate questions, you can make objections; they are answered with simplicity and sincerity, and even with humble-mindedness, if your criticisms are valid. Yes, it is unbelievable, isn't it? Imagine trying to get a Downing Street or a Quai d'Orsay high official to listen to you or explain a point: in England you would be frozen out and in France you would immediately acquire a *dossier* as a mysterious, suspicious individual probably in the pay of some foreign State. The secretaries, who are generally women, cannot do too much for you; it does not seem to them in the least extraordinary that you should want to talk to somebody important; they will telephone to arrange a meeting, tell you who are the useful people to see, further the proceedings with sympathy, and give you all the literature and the administrative reports you need on any subject. There is not a country in the world where access to information and to eminent personages is as direct and easy as in America. The assumption appears to be that those in office represent the public, which pays their salaries, and so the public has a right to their time and attention, however outstanding their job may be or overwhelming their functions. Throughout the whole Administration, the tradition is simplicity; the principle, to supply the people freely and frankly with knowledge; and the spirit, one of readiness to help you in any search, regardless of the trouble it entails. I often think that this temper and this practice of the American officials is the truest and most enduring justification of America's claim to be democratic.

To return to the Government buildings. There is one point on which the attacks of the young American architects are fair enough. The new constructions are *incongruous*. When the first burst of admiration has subsided, a sense of fitness compels you to say to them: "You really are very handsome and majestic, but listen, why on earth did you turn up here? I'm terribly afraid you don't belong!" That's

the snag I was speaking of a moment ago. Because they don't belong, they make Washington look artificial. The town is not at one with its own architecture, and this deliberate resurrection of antiquity is not its rightful expression. The pomp and splendour are imposed, like theatrical properties upon a stage; they do not emanate from the minds and customs of the people. There is, lying close at hand, an exquisite example of the indigenous American style, the White House. It is a pity the authorities sniffed at its charm, and went wandering into a tremendously alien past to pull out of its recesses a grandiose but inappropriate setting. The White House, moreover, is a lesson to all democracies, and the European, sick to death of the castles and palaces, the stupid automatic soldiers, the snobbish blank-faced menials that inflate the pretensions of his rulers, monarchical or republican or communist or fascist, takes an unflinching delight in the pleasant harmonious villa with its park-like, welcoming air. No sentries, no policemen round it, no ushers with farcical trappings, no Masters of Ceremonies handing you outrageous instructions, in it. Clear, fearless and friendly in the middle of the city, it looks as if it were inviting you to step in. I suppose it must be guarded, but even if its appearance of genial familiarity was partly a sham, it is singularly refreshing to find the abode of the head of a great nation feigning cordiality and goodwill instead of power and pride.

Washington, however, is not composed only of classical reminiscences. Its most attractive quarter is, to me, gabled, porticoed, columned Georgetown, where quaint, capricious, original little houses, well over a hundred years old, crush or tumble over each other on both sides of narrow cobblestone streets, like dainty, tipsy gnomes. It was a very small, authentically southern town which lived alone till Washington spread out and annexed it. How pretty American houses were before the Victorian era infected the country can best be appreciated by comparing Georgetown with the rich residential sections of the capital, at the other end: of all the

dismal, parvenu "mansions" which ignorant and tasteless millionaires ever erected, they are the most ghastly. They startled me, used though I am to London, whose nineteenth-century ugliness they reflect, but even London never invented such a unique monstrosity as the brown battlemented pseudo-medieval fortress some Washingtonian built in a fit of delirium. The foreign diplomats have chosen to dwell in things that resemble stodgy slabs of indigestible cake; one is frosted pink with Gothic windows; as to what they concocted when they thought out styles for themselves, Lordy! go and look at the British Embassy!

As Washington sinks lower and lower in the social scale, it reproduces more and more faithfully all the English architectural vices of dullness and monotony. I cannot explain why the Anglo-Saxon races are afflicted with such a mania for copying, but copy they do, with a passionate resolution to be exactly like their neighbour. Middle-class Washington, true to type, shows a hideous predilection for sameness, aggravated by the love of a red like dried stale blood in a butcher's shop. Scores of these dingily scarlet, nondescript streets discourage you as you walk through the city: all respectable, all banal. The Negro alleys, which are allowed to creep up to the precincts of the Capitol, go one better, for to drabness they add decrepitude—one wonders how those patched and squalid hovels, decayed and rotten through and through, still manage to stand. I saw some of the interiors of the Washington slums, and all I can say is that they are more worthy of the jungle than of the Most Important Capital in the world. The numerous dump-heaps, too, and the unsightly waste-grounds, which seem to be as ineradicable in Washington as in every other town in the United States, are not quite what one expects from such a self-respecting figure.

Yet in spite of all these blemishes and contradictions, which make Washington a hotch-potch, at times too august, at others too sordid, your attitude towards it does not remain

critical for very long. Always you fall back under the spell of its gentle boundless skies; its lovely trees that form living arches, blotting out its imperfections; its untrammelled places; its vivid plazas and vistas; its vast avenues and the handsome cool whiteness of its aloof academic reverie; its air, when the cherry-trees burst into delicate flame, near the glittering Potomac, of a flowery country where it's always afternoon, where time is unhurried, and care does not press upon the spirit. Washington is like a siren--its tail may be an eyesore, but it tucks it away, and its face has a graciousness one never forgets.

... A word on Mount Vernon, the estate of George Washington. They've made of it a very noble picture of life in America at the beginning of the Republic. Grounds, house, atmosphere: there's not a flaw in their serenity and dignity. But the reason for which the Americans squeezed the first President and his wife, completely awry, into an excruciatingly ill-proportioned sort of cubby-hole, with a howling asymmetry in back door and front gate, some American must explain to me, because I failed to understand.

### § 3

I made a discovery in Washington, and I won't let anybody agitate me by telling me I didn't, even if it happens to be true. I discovered a *type américain*. Yes, of course I know that the typical American is an abstraction, and I renounce the hope of ever defining an American; he is unlike himself in every region of his land. (The nearest description I can give of him is that he is the Repudiation of a European: we'll let it go at that.) But in comparison with New York, at least, Washington possesses some quality that seems "native" to a foreigner. You perceive a common denominator in it, a participation in a basic way of life and thought, evident in the physique of the men, usually tall, quiet, kindly-looking;

in the women, touched-up without exaggeration; in the correct clothes, fashionable certainly, but worn unobtrusively; in the regulated deportment, the careful speech and the leisurely movements. You feel, around you, a general sedateness, measure and agreeableness. In the streets, the manners of the pedestrians are as good as in London—I know of no higher praise—the people direct you affably and the men stop when you accost them and take off their hats! I could hardly believe my eyes and ears; I had, perforce, got so used to being shoved aside in the metropolis. In the stores I was served with helpful attention; in the hotels, the maids inquired after my comfort, the waiters thanked me for my tips, the cashiers smiled at me when I paid my bills. This was indeed a poised and urbane population, removed as far from glamour and the quick splitting flash of genius as from vulgarity of any obvious kind: in a word, a well-bred, sober, intelligent and civilized provincial bourgeoisie.

The Americans say that Washington is an unreal city, and in a way perhaps this is true. After the War of Independence, it became necessary to found a national capital for the United States, and an acute quarrel started concerning its site, partly out of jealousy, partly out of fear that if a State capital or city were chosen, it would interfere with the workings of the Federal Government. At last Jefferson, who wanted to honour the South, made a deal with Hamilton, who needed his support for the passing of a finance bill; a spot on the Potomac was agreed upon, and Washington began to exist round about 1800. Though the plans were superb from the commencement for a long time the city was a sort of marsh, with only one wing of the Capitol and the President's house to adorn it, and the disgusted Congressmen, who had to lodge in Georgetown and flounder in the swamps, kept calling it the "Wilderness City," the "Capital of Miserable Huts," the "City of Streets without Houses," or the "Mudhole equal to the Great Serbonian Bog." In 1814, during the second war with Great Britain, the English further



depleted it by burning the one Capitol wing and the President's house. It continued to be an object of dislike and derision, always on the verge of being abandoned, until the Civil War (1861), when the Confederates boasted that in a few weeks the Southern flag would float over the Capitol, and the North, alarmed, lost its lethargy and swiftly transformed the despised town into a great military post, protecting it on all sides with strong earthworks.

The government entrenched itself there for good. It was never deemed expedient to move it, for though large cities sprang up throughout America, and a transfer to New York, notably, would have appeared logical, the South and the West and the Middle West were all fiercely suspicious of each other and of Wall Street, and no government could afford to be thought the tool of finance or of regional interests. So Washington grew irrevocably into a political and bureaucratic centre, loftily remote from the activities of the vulgarian States, the detached and elegant home of the Executive, the Legislative, the Judiciary and the foreign representatives. It is governed by Congress, which appoints Commissioners for that purpose, and is non-voting, for its inhabitants have no voice in its management, they are not represented in the Houses and cannot elect the President of their country. It has hardly any trade or manufactures of its own, and about one-fourth of its population is employed in the Administration. A kind of modern version of Versailles, keeping itself to itself in a beautiful reservation and constituting the paradox of an aristocratic organism planted in the midst of a democracy. . . .

Its atmosphere is therefore so peculiar as to be unique. In its curiously bare environment, it supplies the theories and motives and decrees of government but remains outside their practical developments, neither witnessing with its own eyes what they turn into, nor speaking to the people face to face. Its function is entirely specific, and its position so isolated that it cannot clothe that function in any sort of garb.

There *is* no garb available, no masses, classes, or movements, to distract the onlooker's gaze. Washington simply does not contain the elements necessary to conceal its intentions or disguise its aims. The consequence is that it has to explain all it does, directly, and all its mechanism is exposed, naked, to a white glare of observation, investigation and criticism. Not a fluctuation or modification of the system, not a back-sliding, not a slip, can occur without its being instantly checked; every step must be taken in a concentration of light. Whether it likes to or not, Washington is obliged to operate in the open—a compulsion that the European devoutly wishes would overtake his own dodging, writhing, double-crossing rulers at home. The Americans, at least, can't complain of not knowing what their Government is up to. Besides, the newspaper men in the national capital act like X-rays on a defenceless victim, revealing its innermost insides. You never saw such a Press; there is nothing like it in Europe; monstrously pampered, hectoring, indiscreet, barging in everywhere, if you don't knuckle under to it you are done for. I am a journalist myself and appreciate to the full the value of professional liberty, but the American Press is an out-and-out Terror and the Administration panders to it much too much.

But though Washington is debarred from cheating successfully, the very seclusion and set-apartness which make for its abnormal virtue are a peril. When you are divorced by function and distance from the immediately tangible, the *physical* results of your doings, you lose a certain sense of precision. The capital is like a laboratory where national serums are fabricated intensively, and forthwith dispatched to every region. But the guinea-pigs to whom the serums are applied are so very very far away, that the inventors in the laboratory cannot discern clearly, nor test exactly, the effects of their experiments. Diverse, individualized, at the other end of immeasurable vastnesses, the guinea-pigs have a trick of reacting most weirdly to Washington's prescrip-

tions. It was when I looked at the croppers poor, dear, idealistic, sometimes heroic and oftener chaotic Washington comes, that I began to wonder whether America is really not too big to govern.

This same peculiarity of Washington has another drawback, for unless you are passionately interested in political and social questions—as I was, for instance—there is little excitement to be got out of living in the town. All the brains are in the Administration and the Civil Service; they are generally of a very high order, but naturally enough they are specialized and much too intent on their official job to show gusto in anything else. Absorbing work makes existence very sober, and the necessity to take public opinion into account makes it restricted and unspontaneous. The city is essentially one of earnest and responsible Government workers, and social life is influenced by their mentality. I found myself in my own element, incomparably more so than in New York; I was in contact with more penetrating and creative intelligences than I have ever been in my life; but I was in search of just the very special food Washington manufactures and dispenses, so all my needs were admirably satisfied. But if you want fun, you mustn't go to Washington. It hasn't one really first-class shop; it has nothing like a good restaurant; night-clubs and the dancing there are deadly; and "society" is, if possible, even more mortal. Congress is diverting only up to a point; I apologize to America, but I never could bring myself to take it seriously; something in the atmosphere turns it into an entertainment, though I can't say what. Perhaps the representatives of the people are too familiar; perhaps too many unsavoury stories about them circulate; perhaps you get a feeling that they are too wily in their home-affairs and too ignorant in world-affairs; perhaps they talk too long. When I listened to them, Philip had to keep on telling me sharply: "Now, Missis Oh, pay attention—these men and women are settling the business of America," and I'd answer, inexplicably but sincerely

surprised: "Really, Philip, *do* they know very much about it?" It all seemed curiously like a skit on the United States. The rich, conventional, hollow bourgeoisie is riddled with pseudo-intellectual pretensions; the political and journalistic chit-chatterers are eternally occupied with the *coulisse* events of the White House and Congress; the embassies and legations pursue indescribably silly, snobbish and futile conversations and intrigues. (*What* a bunch of spiteful, trivial, and utterly useless nonentities these foreign groups are! I speak from disgusted experience; my father belonged to the diplomatic corps, and I was brought up in its shallow and artificial miasmas; it took me years and years to get rid of the blight of its false and foolish values. Why this costly, misleading, mischievous, misinforming and obsolete institution is not scrapped and replaced by consuls and direct telephoning, I do not understand.) No, much as I enjoyed Washington and benefited by it, I cannot say that it is amusing. Zest, exhilaration, leaping and changing vitality, fancifulness and wayward invention have no part in its steady, heavy, and rather dreary rhythm. I think that after some time it is inevitable that you should feel it is a tread-mill, and you, unfortunately, the mule that goes round and round.

#### § 4

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, made—and at the time of writing is still making—an attempt to govern the bigness of America in an unaccustomed way. His attempt is known as the New Deal, and I don't suppose anything in the history of the New World has been more discussed than its philosophy and the series of methods it comprised. Let's see how it was born.

When the Democratic President installed himself in the White House at Washington, the American System, as we have already remarked, was tumbling about everybody's ears. The administrative structure of the country was

adapted only to prosperity and civil peace, and the régime of "rugged individualism" had prevented any controlling legislation in the fields of finance, economics, and social questions. Now the banks had collapsed, production and exchange were disrupted, one out of every five adult Americans (remember that the population approximates to 130 millions) was out of work, and no provision existed for arbitration between capital and labour, wages and hours, unemployment, health, and old-age pensions. Franklin Roosevelt had to tackle all these overwhelming issues.

There was no machinery to tackle them with, since *laissez-fairist* America had never admitted the need for regulation. To deal with a situation which exacted immediate rectification on pain of irretrievable disaster or revolution, the President, who had nothing to fall back upon, had to conjure out of the air measures and personnel. There was no time to wait and test. He was obliged to create organizations on the spot, from the ground up. I am told that he created to the tune of 55 new departments and 150,000 new officials in less than two years, but considering the size of America, the number of her citizens, and the magnitude of her breakdown, I find that he exercised restraint.

It was impossible to perform such a task of reconstruction according to the standards of normal times. Nor is it possible to judge it by those same standards. The American phenomenon takes a foreigner straight back to those terrible years of the Great War when frantic European Governments had to build up services overnight to meet necessities of national life and death for which they were totally unprepared. In Europe as in America, events had precipitated themselves like avalanches crashing; there had been little knowledge and less foresight; the circumstances were unprecedented, the requirements were undreamt-of, all the instruments were inadequate. Europe mobilized to fight off an unparalleled military attack; America mobilized to fight off an unparalleled social catastrophe, and both mobi-

lizations took place in identical conditions of emergency and haste. In both continents, at an interval of nineteen years, there was the same hurry, the same mushroom growth of new government departments, the same heterogeneous collection of personalities drawn from wherever they could be got, the same abundance and contradiction of schemes, the same incalculable and reckless expenses. Moreover, like our own leaders, never before had the American leader been faced with such an intricate crisis. Roosevelt was a man whose background, family, social and financial position, culture and temperament had moulded him, from his beginnings, as a Liberal in the traditional English sense of the word: that is, a gentleman of wealth and leisure who was public-spirited and progressive. He belonged to an advanced section of the Democratic Party, and had been a senator, a governor of New York State, and Secretary of the Navy, but although he was remarkably well-informed about matters of general importance, he had no training in social science and economics, and professed no social and economic theories, no fixed ideology, no positive doctrine. His chief assets, in the stupendous rôle he started at once to play, were his profoundly sincere humanitarian ideals, his intense curiosity for ideas, his love of experimentation, his prodigious receptiveness, his unlimited courage and enterprise, his exceedingly dominating will. Add to these natural dispositions the tragical urgency for instant remedies, and you will understand the line of conduct he adopted.

He gave almost every person throughout the length and breadth of America, who was known to have a workable plan for improving the national situation, the chance to go to the White House and explain his project—and if that project seemed at all practicable, it was given a trial and the person remained in Washington as a government official. These projects constituted the “New Deal,” and their initiators, the “New Dealers.” Never, anywhere, were concepts and people accorded such an opportunity and such a welcome as

during the first years of Roosevelt's presidency. Never, anywhere, was there such a determination to try all ameliorations, regardless of party strictures, class prejudices, and individual interests. Never, anywhere, was there such a lack of discrimination, first because of the President's own nature, part of whose charm is in his power of almost universal responsiveness, secondly because, even if he had had an infallible sense of discernment and could have distinguished with absolute certainty between the reasonable and the unreasonable, the capable and the incapable who came forward with suggested cures, there was literally no time to apply criteria. What followed, then, was an incredible medley of schemes, from the craziest goose-chase to the most seriously elaborated technical projects, and the marshalling of a fantastic range of abilities, from the charlatan and the dud to the outstanding trained expert. Since the President was not a doctrinaire, but was building his own administrative mind from the egg up, no central unifying idea, no stable dominant theme, came from the White House; since basic philosophies were so different, plans so diverse and conflicting, directors so various and unequal, and bureaus so multitudinous and uncoordinated, the new frame, erected under stress and strain, was uneven in its appearance and at cross-purposes in its activities. But I repeat that no European who recollects his War Bureaus of 1914 to 1918 has the right to criticize the Roosevelt Administration at its inception. He recognizes the set-up, with its consequences of confusion, overlapping, redundancy and waste—and he recognizes the atmosphere, with the fever and bustle, the endless talks, appeals and confabulations, the interminable discussion of personalities, the idealism and the cynicism, the self-sacrifice and the ambition, the industry and the shirking, the energetic conviction and the wearied *à quoi bon*. In our national drama we turned out martyrs and traitors, believers and doubters, visionaries and featherers-of-their-own-nests. Being human, the Americans assumed similar guises.

In this extraordinarily variegated assembly there was, nevertheless, a core. It was composed of a group of intellectuals, baptized by a journalist the "Brain Trust"—a name which stuck—most of them young, nearly all of them professors of law or political economy in celebrated universities, who had written brilliant books or otherwise demonstrated that they had ideas. The President made some of them Under-Secretaries of State and told all of them to draw up the policies of his New Deal. Think of it! Intellectuals in Washington, at the head of American affairs! Not senators or representatives or business men or the tried old war-horses of politics, but teachers, reformists, more or less Radicals, "infant prodigies," who had never had any practical experience or any personal knowledge of realities, who had done nothing but theorize or batter at the American System and its practical-minded administrators, and to whom Roosevelt said: "You criticized. You planned on paper. Now the authority is yours. Go ahead and realize your imaginations." They were burningly eager, utterly convinced and sincere, and their thought had already shaped a new American world. With the support of the President behind them, the vital interest of the common people centred on them, astronomical sums at their disposal, up they leaped to make their dreams come true.

I have no axe to grind in America, so I can afford to view the Roosevelt Administration objectively—and I hope profoundly that I have done so, even though it has put up my taxes enormously. I went through three stages of perception regarding it.

1. The first stage was on my arrival in America, when I was too new to things to take in more than the most general, most protruding characteristics of the régime. I thought almost at once that it had staggering faults. It showed imprecision, fluctuation, ignorance, lack of technique and efficiency—though how any Administration can be efficient under the ruling legislative methods and the opposing and



hampering claims of forty-eight sovereign States, I cannot tell. No American administration ever was. It squandered fabulously, partly owing to its incoherence and partly to the improvident attitude of the President himself towards money. Indeed, for a long time the financial policy of the New Deal consisted in declaring jauntily: "For Heaven's sake, *why* worry? This is such a *rich* country! Just vote to spend the dollars, and they will materialize." It airily invented or sponsored grandiose enterprises, without an inkling of their cost or prevision of their fate. Again and again it deliberately flouted legality and invited the retribution that smashed its most cherished objectives. It practised tremendous favouritism, and juggled with jobs and subsidies for election aims. This, by the way, though deplorable from the standpoint of the moralist who insists that good means are every whit as indispensable as good ends, is one of the most irrefragible customs of America and must be taken as a matter of course. It was a constant source of amusement to me to hear the outcry the Republicans made against the New Deal on this score. Themselves the staunchest upholders of this immemorial tradition when they were in office, they poured out Niagaras of indignation when the "spoils system," the "pork barrel," and "boondoggling" were exercised by their adversaries. In reality the principle had not undergone the slightest change; it was only operating on a wider scale, with larger credits, and on the Democratic side. The Government incessantly sprang surprises on the country, maintaining it in a state of nervous uncertainty. Its direction was not definite, and one could not perceive to what it was ultimately leading the nation.

At the same time it seemed to me that its merits were immense, and as incontestable as its defects. The great figures, the men and women at the top, were *personally* honest to a degree perhaps never before attained by public officials in the United States. There was a disinterestedness and earnestness that stamped them as whole-hearted servants of

the community. Whether they believed or not that they would accomplish their aims was immaterial to the devotion and patience with which they toiled. Generally speaking, the spirit of the entire Administration struck me as a love of social justice, a sense of duty towards the disinherited classes, a preoccupation with the needs of the people at large. The President, in a memorable phrase, had said he was out to help the "Forgotten Man." Essentially this remains true of the inspiration of his Government. If the practical failures were very numerous, if the swings from left to right and back again were very disconcerting, and the moves often very inconsistent, the ardour of desire, the firmness of intention to defend the weak against the strong, the under-privileged against the over-privileged, to pull the submerged out of their hopeless circumstances, break the strangle-hold of autocratic finance and business on the exploited, enable the masses to benefit by the natural resources of the land, instruct the ignorant and establish a genuinely equalitarian form of democracy which would correspond to modern conceptions of justice and liberty, to the social necessities of our age and to the progress achieved by natural and technical sciences, never wavered. The Administration was intelligent enough to recognize the inevitable quality of the future, generous enough to believe it right, and sincere enough to fight, by no means always wisely but always bravely, on its behalf. Its heart and, within the cramping restrictions of the Constitution—sometimes, even, beyond them—its weight and influence were on the side of the victims of the American System. I could not predict whether its material reforms would last in violent, emotional and dangerous America, but what I believed would endure was the incomparable quickening of mind and conscience that it wrought in the people. The New Deal had started a general process of thinking, an exercise with which the bulk of the nation was completely unfamiliar; an interest in government; a sense of civic responsibility and an appreciation of universal issues that are propelling irre-

sistibly America towards her maturity. That performance alone would suffice to stamp the Roosevelt Administration as heroic.

2. My second stage was an attempt to understand something about the New Deal's most spectacular measures. At this time of day it is superfluous to describe its Acts in detail, even if I could grapple with their technicalities, which I cannot, or if the economic experts gave me a lead, which they do not, being irreconcilably divided in their views. Besides, a good many of the New Deal's innovations have now been scrapped, either because the Supreme Court declared them unconstitutional or because they proved to be impracticable. Finally, while we in Europe are still studying it—and wondering why the devil it gave rise to such a hullabaloo, for on a number of points the advanced Democracies of Europe outstripped it long years ago—the Americans consider it to be already ancient history. But to get an idea, and to give my readers an idea, of the scope of the experiment, I was obliged to examine its cardinal chapters.

In 1933 "the lift was down in the cellar"; it couldn't go any lower. To bring it up at least to the ground floor, the President decreed that the banks were to have a holiday. They all closed, which allowed them to pull themselves together and stopped the run on deposits. For a week, nobody in America had any liquid money, and the country reverted to barter. Hoarding was made so heavily punishable by law that more than half the gold which had gone underground returned to the Treasury. Though Prohibition could not be immediately repealed, since that necessitated an Amendment, a vote by three-quarters of the States, the President authorized the manufacture and sale of light beer, which put hundreds of thousands of citizens back to work at once, and increased the revenues of the State. These were the Emergency Measures.

Then came the Temporary and the Permanent Measures.

I shall not attempt to catalogue them strictly, for they developed a confusing knack of changing places. Some temporary measures became fixtures, and some permanent ones burnt themselves out as swiftly as a straw fire. Congress having, like the nation, more or less lost its head, looked to Franklin Roosevelt as its sole saviour, and fell over itself to do, and give him, everything he wanted. The first thing he wanted was money. He instantly got unheard-of appropriations, to the tune of over four billion dollars for a year—and more later. Out they went to the twenty million and something Americans who had no resources—in the form of direct relief or the dole, which varied according to the States and the standard of living in each region (for instance, a family would obtain nine dollars a month in Tennessee and forty-six a month in New York); of great public works (P.W.A.) where millions were set to building roads, bridges, irrigation-systems, post-offices, schools, hospitals, naval constructions; of civil works of all sorts (C.W.A., W.P.A., E.W.R.—as in Soviet Russia, all the letters of the alphabet pranced about in the wildest jigs and hardly anybody yet knows what they pranced for), which ranged from fighting mosquitoes, rats, erosion, cleaning parks, avenues, railways, digging ditches and drains, stadiums and swimming-pools, to making geographical maps, designing monuments, painting pictures, creating theatres and ambulatory companies of actors and singers, teaching eurhythmics to public school-children; and of the Civilian Conservation Corps (C.C.C.), camps where young men, drawn from farming and working-class families, were trained in afforestation, the draining of swamps, the tracing of roads, the colonization of unfertile lands, the reclaiming of deserts: a superb institution which rescued hundreds of thousands of adolescents from despair and crime and has now been made definitive. The immediate aim was to find work for the unemployed—failing that, to invent it; and the Administration poured out an incalculable amount of idealism, ardour, sincerity, energy, ingenuity, money and

recklessness in this herculean attempt. I cannot think of any kind of human activity, cerebral or manual, technical or artistic, useful or superfluous, which the New Deal, impelled by philanthropy and the conviction that the dole shattered the self-respect of the proud American citizen, did not call into being (though it often seemed to me that it over-estimated the pride of the American citizen, for like everybody else, he took so quickly and naturally to relief that now he regards it as a basic duty the State owes him). Some of these activities, in the educational and artistic fields especially, have broadened and stimulated the American poor people permanently—there were millions who had never seen a play or heard orchestral music!

That was in the social domain generally. But beyond the immediate aim of nourishing the destitute and putting the unemployed back to work was the fervent modern philosophy of the President's "Brain Trust," at that time the keenest, boldest and most influential of his advisers. Now the Brain Trust's fundamental doctrine was that a system in which millions of people were roofless in towns full of empty houses, starving when granaries were full of undistributed food, miserably clad when factories were full of mountains of tissues, was wickedly insane. Its fundamental objective, therefore, was to augment the purchasing power of the masses so that all these goods, already existing, or so easy to supply, might be, not Stocked, but Bought. To achieve this objective, a reorganization of Industry, and consequently of Labour's relations with Industry, was indispensable. Such a reorganization was conceived in the National Recovery Administration, the famous N.R.A. The President sent up to Congress, and Congress immediately passed, laws whose intention was to diminish the hours of work, so that more men should be employed in production; to maintain salaries at, or increase them to, a minimum wage, so as to amplify the purchasing power of the common people; to limit the rise of industrial prices to the real rise in the cost of produc-

tion; to demand that the industrialists, after consultation with their workmen, should present a "Code" of their particular industry (the industries that drew up such a Code were rewarded by a badge, a "blue eagle," and the public was urged to buy their products preferably to others); to coerce recalcitrants by refusing them licences for continuing to manufacture. None of your piddling little reforms here, as you see. The Brain Trust, when it conceived, conceived giants.

This industrial reorganization took place under a sort of genius, General Hugh Johnson, known throughout America for the brutal and stimulating realism of his language, and his phenomenal vigour and capacity for work. Industrialists, Labour leaders and delegates, Government officials, flocked to his office in Washington to elaborate the Codes, which were then submitted to the President. Some Americans have told me that these epoch-making meetings were from the first blackly befogged with mutual suspicions and recriminations; others, that the industrialists, the Labour leaders and delegates, the Government officials, displayed a spirit akin to that of the Night-of-August-the-Fourth: you know, that historical night, just before the Revolution, when the French aristocracy and clergy renounced their privileges; and that it was all so enthusiastic and fraternal that even the Consumer, that eternal half-wit and victim, got a peep-in, and was assured that his interests would be considered. Since miracles do happen, this is possible, but there is no trace that the assurance materialized. In any case, even if the inspiration of the Codes was at one time genuinely democratic and generous, I cannot say that the Codes themselves were calculated to simplify the affairs of America. Indeed, when in my innocence I asked if I could get a copy of them, I learnt that they composed, with their supplements, eighteen volumes of thirteen thousand pages. I was so disheartened that I turned sour, and reflected that the same results might have been obtained, on the same subject, in a

madhouse. To tell the truth, such of the Codes as I studied, to get a faint notion of the meaning of the whole thing, left me with a doubly uneasy impression: that they had been drawn up preponderantly by the industrialists (probably that was inevitable, since the industrialists seemed to be the only people who knew their business), and that American business methods were rotten to the core, for the Codes were thick with the enumeration of the tricks, lies and ruses resorted to both by producers and traders—especially in the automobile field—and with recommendations as to how to circumvent these universally dishonest practices. I had no idea that the essence of American industry and commerce was such unmitigated knavery: it took me dreadfully aback. There were 682 Codes of “loyal competition,” 185 supplementary Codes, 685 Amendments to the Codes, 139 general regulations, 70 executive decrees and 11,000 “interpretative circulars.” *Time*, one of the youngest and most intelligent of American reviews, and undoubtedly the most irreverent, said that in the same circumstances Moses would have been compelled to spend his days climbing up and sliding down Mount Sinai: the comment had a certain appositeness.

Maybe the Codes were too unwieldy. Maybe their burning spirit waned too quickly. Maybe the Government had neither the knowledge, the technique, nor the equipment necessary to administer them; or Big Business, after the first few terrified months when it was ready to follow Franklin Roosevelt anywhere, recovered its nerve and its greed; or the theories of the Brain Trust were really erroneous and its “mystique” really unsound and perhaps it really *is* impossible that a too-rigorously planned economy should reign in a capitalistic system—one of the two must go to the wall. I cannot help you to a decision. Anyhow, a year after its birth, the N.R.A. found itself in its death-throes. The fixation of prices and the control of production turned out to be insuperable difficulties; Radical opinion loudly proclaimed that the small producers and the consumers had

been sacrificed to heavy industry, which they undoubtedly had; Labour was violently discontented, as it always is, and the syndicates split over a question of representation, as they usually do; the quarrels between the Federal Trade Commission and the administrators of the N.R.A. were legion, and the conclusions of the investigatory committees formed to examine the results of the scheme were almost invariably hostile. General Johnson resigned from his functions with an appropriately resounding *éclat*. The President named a National Industrial Recovery Board to replace him. Then occurred the grotesque incident of some dead chickens, the Schechter case, which the N.R.A. officials declared to be a violation of the Code regulating the poultry industry in the region of New York, and the inculpated merchant, indignant at being beaten over the head with his own hens—defunct at that—went to law.

This was a heaven-sent opportunity for the enemies of the N.R.A., who by now were as the grains of sand on the shores of the Atlantic. They made it a test-case. It was sent up from court to court, its implications becoming vaster and vaster on the way, till by the time it reached the august precincts of the Supreme Court, this matter of the corpses of a few fowls had turned into a question of the validity of the Codes themselves—and therefore of the whole *raison d'être* of the N.R.A. It was the first time it had been challenged, and it was the last, for the Justices argued that Congress had no right to delegate its specific power to evolve or impose new laws to any authority whatsoever, President or industrialists or Labour leaders or Government officials—which meant, in effect, the authority that had made the Codes. So, unanimously decided the Justices, the N.R.A. was unconstitutional, and forthwith they committed legal infanticide on the Brain Trust's most audaciously revolutionary child. Back went America to her old habits, and you got again what you had before the New Deal existed: uncontrolled prices and production, huge variations in wages, unequal



hours of work, child labour, shops open until ten or eleven o'clock at night, discrimination against members of Labour syndicates, no cohesion anywhere save in the very powerful trade-unions—the old unorganized, anarchistic, insecure, plutocratic and autocratic form of nineteenth-century Capitalism. And that was that.

As I've stated before, I am not an economist, and cannot tell whether the N.R.A. hastened or retarded recovery. What struck me—and this is a remark that applies to all the enterprises of the New Deal except the Tennessee Valley Authority—was that from the point of view of the Americans it was a tremendous innovation, and that from the point of view of a European it was a very belated imitation of theories and methods which the advanced Democracies of the Old World had put through sixty or even seventy years ago. Essentially, the N.R.A. was an attempt at corporatism, a very old acquaintance in Europe, and as to the social legislation it aimed at, the surprise the latter provokes in a foreign observer comes from the fact not of its novelty, but of its laggingness and anæmia. The reforms that seemed so startling to the American people are in Europe merely subjects of academic discussion. Legislation on wages, hours, child labour, the right of collective bargaining, arbitration between Capital and Labour, trade-unionism, freedom for the workers to choose their own representatives, picketing, unemployment insurance, health and old age pensions, obligatory compensation for factory and domestic accidents—all these things, which the N.R.A. wanted, which it failed to get definitively, and which America is actually obtaining only in patches, bit by bit, and very restrictedly—mostly because of the fight the vigorous new wing of Labour under John L. Lewis, the Committee for Industrial Organization or C.I.O., is putting up—represent issues that have been, for such a long time now, part of the social structure of Scandinavia, Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, England, France, pre-War Germany where the first concessions were obtained as far

back as under Bismarck, that it is impossible for a European to become excited.

Indeed, the comment that rises most naturally to our lips is: "*What!* Do you really mean to say that you haven't got those elementary regulations yet?" If the commentator is French he can add: "Ha! Look at us! Since 1936 we are so modern that the social insurances for workers are eight times the measly little provision that poor Franklin D. had to struggle so hard to get for you; we give the proletariat fifteen days paid-holidays in the year and a substantial monthly subsidy for each of its children under fourteen years of age (these last two items are exclusively at the employer's expense, though for the life of me I cannot see why he must pay for the successful copulations of his employees: personally I feel outraged at being legally obliged to maintain the upshot of my cook's, or chauffeur's, or gardener's, or agricultural labourer's reckless amorousness); the workers toil only forty hours in the week, in spite of the fact that insufficient production and exportation are smashing our country's economy; and when they are displeased with their boss they can occupy his business premises. Take a leaf out of our book and justify that label of Democracy which you so complacently but so illogically wear!" Child labour is entirely eliminated in the countries I've just mentioned; company unions, organized strike-breaking on the part of the employers, the prohibition of picketing, do not exist. The theory of State intervention in industrial and commercial affairs started with mid-nineteenth-century socialism; it is applied in a multitude of fields and is gaining so much ground that already basic industries have been nationalized in some very progressive Democracies. A Public Works Programme was instituted in France years before the New Deal got it going in America, and the social philosophy motivating relief—that the State, not private charities, is responsible for, and must support certain classes of citizens ruined by national conditions—was adopted by

European countries immediately after the Great War. Where the New Deal scored was in inventiveness (its public works were legion); in largeness of scope (almost every category of people benefited by relief); and in its astronomical expenditures (which Europe could not emulate). Otherwise, never did a mountain give birth, with such ear-splitting screams, to such a tiny mouse.

The same remark holds good in the financial sphere. The President abandoned the gold standard and reduced the dollar to half its value, thereby creating inflation, a measure enthusiastically endorsed by all the classes, save the creditor class, naturally enough, as one of the easiest remedies for their ills. Therein, too, he only followed Europe's example, with this small difference: that we had already learnt that the remedy of inflation is only apparent and has to be paid for through the nose later on. Another furiously discussed reform was the Securities and Exchange Commission. Banks issuing bonds were made responsible for the exactitude of the information their prospectuses supplied to the public; persons and institutions selling bonds were forbidden to receive deposits, and a "mutual insurance" was created for all deposits inferior to ten thousand dollars. England had originated this sort of legislation about the middle of the last century, and tightened it up thirty years ago by Company Acts which set the model for laws passed almost everywhere in Europe. That one of the primary duties of the State is to defend its ignorant, foolish, gambling citizens against speculative campaigns—particularly in America, that has more than her share of financial roguery on one hand and public gullibility on the other—is an article of faith with democratic governments. On that point also the New Deal was no roaring pioneer.

Still speaking from the angle of a comparison-making European—and how can I speak from any other angle when nobody in the world presents me with a touchstone by which I can definitely find out whether the financial and economic

results of the New Deal were really good or really bad in the long run for the nation at large?—it is in the field of agriculture that I was most impressed by the “newness” of the New Deal methods. Certainly no European government ever did, for the farmer, anything like as much as the Roosevelt Administration did. In a way, public opinion in America was more prepared for State intervention in agricultural matters than in industrial matters. It recognized that the farmers were ground to bits between the upper and nether millstones of mortgaged lands and over-production, although very frequently it was their own unwisdom and desire of great and rapid gain, or their own dreadful mismanagement of the soil that were responsible for their plight—for if anything can be truthfully averred of the average American farmer it is that he is not a land-loving animal but a land-exploiting animal who has ravaged and looted the natural resources of his continent every whit as disastrously as the predatory big business man. Besides, the farmers never made the mistake of letting public opinion ignore that plight; they always were past masters in the art of clamorous and unremitting self-lamentation and protestation. To prevent the expropriations and forced sales that were driving the farmers to frenzy, the State took over part of the mortgages, and printed bonds guaranteed by the Treasury, which were then given to the creditors in exchange for the capital they had lent to the farmers—while the farmers themselves became the debtors of the State, with very long delays for repayment. I suppose the nation will have to shoulder, in the end, these debts to the State, for if I know anything about farmers, they will consider that all they got was far short of what they deserved.

Another necessity was to raise the price of agricultural products to a level of subsistence for the farmer. Under President Hoover the State had bought up stocks and the experiment had failed utterly. The New Deal, with the Agricultural Adjustment Act, or A.A.A., decided to regulate

production by limiting it. The farmers were called upon to restrict voluntarily the acreage planted heretofore with "basic products," such as wheat, cotton, tobacco, corn, rice, to which list were later added milk and its derivatives, barley, flax, sugar-canes and others. In exchange for their collaboration they received compensatory indemnities or "benefit payments" obtained from a "processing tax," that is, a tax levied upon the products at the first stage of their transformation—wheat at the miller's, cotton at the spinner's, tobacco at the cigarette-manufacturer's, and so on. The soil thus released from cultivation was to be used for pasture or for growing vegetables for the farmer's own consumption. Furthermore, live-stock and hogs were slaughtered in tremendous numbers, a procedure that reminds one of the Massacre of the Innocents, and, like that historical exploit, smacks singularly of both barbarity and stupidity. Still, what I think of these measures is neither here nor there; the fact is that the price of agricultural products was raised; the farmer turned out less and the wretched consumer paid more, and the immemorial "backbone of the country," which had undeniably been rather bent, was straightened up again.

Other extremely interesting innovations—not comprised in the A.A.A. but pertaining to agricultural questions—that left Europe far behind America in the same line of experimentation, were the Ever-Normal Granary Plan; the Resettlement Administration, primarily out to rescue sub-marginal farmers and remove them from exhausted soil to better lands on a self-sufficient basis; the superhuman efforts of the Home Bureau of Economics to train the rural masses in domestic economy, efficiency, and hygiene, by means of demonstrations, lectures, visits of expert agents, the cinema and publications on every single subject that concerns the farmer's budget and interests. (My God! If the peasants of any country in Europe had had spent upon them a millionth part of the time, trouble, care and money which the Department of Agriculture bestows upon the American farmers,

they would be sitting on the top of the world. And the world, physically at least, would be a more beautiful place, for the European peasant cherishes and tends the land, understands and respects its rhythm, and at the least encouragement turns it into a nosegay as well as into a source of food. But he is an inarticulate and patient fellow, used to misery and to being passed over, so he gets nothing from Government. The American farmer, who so frequently manhandles the earth, and who is always insatiable, gets wet-nursed by Government to an incredible extent. Yet taking him altogether, as a class, I repeat that he has done more to deplete his country's natural resources than almost anyone in America.) Above all, there is the magnificent enterprise of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which is establishing successfully a sort of planned economy, entirely uncoercive, in one of the poorest and most neglected regions of the United States, and is to my mind the only scheme that can conceivably provide the design for a solution of the problem of Capitalism.

All these projects were vast and bold, but here again they met with diverse fortunes and none can say what the ultimate consequences of the agricultural policy will be. The immediate consequences (though it was mainly the farmer-owner who profited: certainly not the tenant-farmer, the sharecropper, the agricultural labourer or the seasonal worker) were, as in the case of the industrial and social policies, to patch up the system and set the machine to work again. True, it knocks incessantly and now and again it stalls completely for a time, but when the New Deal came along it was in dislocated parts all over the ground. The Conservatives say that the dislocation was only apparent; that if that Damned Meddler, Franklin Roosevelt, had left it alone, it would have picked itself up by reason of its intrinsic virtue and magic, and started functioning all right once more. As it is, they opine, he's muddled it up catastrophically. The Radicals say that the whole bloody thing was bad from its inception; it had got worse and worse as it de-

veloped; it was stinking to high heaven of putrid decay, and Franklin Roosevelt should have had the courage and wisdom to scrap all its rotten remains. As it is, they opine, he effected the disastrous rescue of a mechanism that is an outrage to realities and the clear necessities of the future. For different reasons, both camps reject the New Deal with hate and contumely.

Everybody judges, of course, from the point of view of the system one has in one's own head, which is the only thing that can act as a criterion. Personally I believe that Capitalism was not intrinsically doomed to become the ignoble structure it grew into, and that if its essence, the profit-motive, had been reasonably controlled it need not necessarily have turned into the monster it is to-day. The adversaries of Capitalism contend that the profit-motive could never have been controlled. Well, it would take too long to argue about that issue; the fact is that it wasn't controlled and by suppressing status—which was replaced by mere contract leading to a basic insecurity—by giving free rein to usury, monopoly and an unimaginably fierce and dishonest competition, Capitalism has resulted in the intolerable paradox of politically free men who are economic slaves. To my mind, that is why it is impossible that it should continue as it is. It does not correspond in any manner to twentieth-century scientific discoveries, conceptions of social justice and concrete needs, and when there is such irremediable incompatibility between the Spirit of the Times and a system, history proves that, sooner or later, but *always*, the system is destroyed. I am convinced that the present form of Capitalism will ultimately be destroyed. But I am an irreducible Progressive-Liberal and not a revolutionist. I have witnessed four revolutions with my own appalled eyes, since the World War—in Russia, Georgia, Italy and Germany; I went to prison under one of them, the Bolshevik Revolution; and thinking of the course they all took and the results they all achieved, my unshakable opinion is that the means

were fiendish and the results foul. Neither for myself nor for others do I desire any drastic upheavals, and I loathe the cult of the blasted Proletariat just as illimitably as I loathe the cult of the obscene Tribe. Supposing it were in my power to direct a country's destinies, I would accept for the time being the general structure of Capitalism. But I would modify it profoundly by phases. I would resort to graduated income-tax (in no case would revenue be allowed to exceed, say, a hundred thousand dollars a year, which in reality is twice more than is needed in order to live ultra-comfortably!) and to graduated death-duties, not only to increase the resources by which the State could further the welfare of the whole population, but steadily and definitively to diminish inequalities of fortune and opportunity. I would establish at least public control and supervision over all the industries which affect public interests and which now lead straight to the exercise of monopoly power—and some of the basic industries, like coal, electricity, armaments, the railways, I would nationalize at once through public boards and commissions. Later, all important industries would be nationalized by degrees and in developing these nationalized industries the Central Government would plan an appropriate allocation for a large part of the country's annual investment in new capital. The Bank of the country would also be a public institution using its powers and resources to mitigate violent fluctuations in industry and employment. And especially would I spend the State's money to advance the health, education, intelligence, and character of all the people. If the process of gradualness were actively kept up and not allowed to lapse into a coma, these reforms would lead to a huge mitigation of the injustices and instabilities of modern Capitalism and yet retain what in my eyes is the indestructible need and right of the individual—free initiative and a reasonable amount of private property. However, as it is not in my power to direct any country's destinies, there is no point in continuing to elaborate my theories.



I stated them just to explain why I personally sympathized ardently with the major conceptions of the New Deal. It wanted exactly what I did.

3. My third phase concerning the Roosevelt Administration was a tentative summing-up. Up to date, late in A.D. 1938, the New Deal can be divided into four periods. I've already described the first, which was the stage of emergency measures taken to meet the 1932 panic; and the second, which was the laying-down of a permanent programme, some of whose items have gone with the wind, others—like the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Labour Relations Act, the Farming Acts, the T.V.A., Relief—staying the course. The third stage, which came after the second Roosevelt election, was one of sheer political adventure and counter-attack, including the defeated Supreme Court Plan, a most misguided attempt to appoint fifteen Justices instead of nine, deep rifts among the Congressional supporters of the President, showing an emphatic loss of willingness to be led everywhere by the nose; the constant defence of threatened New Deal agencies; a business set-back (Recession) and an economic slump. This period was characterized by more mistakes on the part of the President, more shifting and irrational machinations, and a more concerted drive of his adversaries on his chief projects than ever before—as well as by great Labour unrest and the rapid growth of John L. Lewis's influence among the working-classes. It was a period when the Administration was compelled to recognize that its main economic campaign, made to break the stranglehold Big Business and High Finance had established over the country by means of monopolies, was defeated; when the President seemed as trapped as a mouse in a burrow, and all his moves inconsequential, harassing his foes but also undermining the esteem and confidence of his partisans, who really couldn't be edified by the spectacle of runs and jumps and doubling-backs and sallyings-forth again, just as the humour seized him.

As I write, the New Deal is entering on its fourth stage, with very definite issues to tackle; how to shape a business policy that will at last be truly representative of all the interests involved—labour, the consumer, the investor, management, technology, and finance; how to halt the 1938 Depression; how to heal the Party breach; how to win the next election. Whether these issues will be handled with wisdom, or luck, or success, I do not know. But the whole thing has now crystallized enough to be defined. We can leave aside the Right Wing and the Left Wing indictments, and the laudatory pats the New Deal administers to itself. The whole thing stands out as an attempt, in the economical domain, to curb, restrict and control High Finance and Big Industry, to regulate and help agriculture, and to provide permanent relief for the unemployed masses. In the social domain, it is an attempt to adjust economic factors which were hitherto supposed to be intractable, so as to give the people much more money, many more goods, and, at the same time, a far greater amount of leisure than before. Politically it is an attempt to expand the Federal Government's power of intervention and decision, to assure the continuation of the Democratic Party in office, and to perpetuate Roosevelt's own ideas.

To me, all these objectives seem legitimate, and almost all, excellent; the methods, some very good indeed, some very inefficient indeed—though not invariably through the fault of the Administration!—and a few very reprehensible morally, notably the policy of placing over half the nation's voters on the Government pay-roll, a policy that in effect means bribery. Certain unshakable results have been achieved: a framework of social-security legislation; a fundamental code for Labour in matters of collective bargaining, unionization, wages and hours; precautions against bank stampedes; checking of pillaging activities in the securities markets; the beginnings of a lawful regimentation of trusts and utilities; the education of the public in judicial questions; the commencement of an open struggle, on the side of an

awakening unprivileged majority, against an entrenched privileged minority. Twice the chance to go beyond this structure was given to Roosevelt and twice it was irretrievably muffed—once in 1933, when in the midst of the general panic he could have nationalized the banking and credit system, and again after the 1936 election, when he was at the height of his popularity, and might have driven through a decisive programme of economic planning instead of wasting his energy on a stupid and unnecessary constitutional fight (the idiotic Supreme Court reform). I doubt if events will offer him another opportunity.

And having said all this, I reiterate at the risk of tedium: even supposing that the New Deal was neither thoroughly sagacious, nor thoroughly adequate, nor thoroughly honest; even supposing that it never does advance any further; even supposing that it only manages to conserve the positions it now has; even supposing that history subsequently shows it cured none of the country's ills permanently—for all time the irrefutable fact will remain that it flung a challenge to an undisputed plutocracy; tried to modify the evils of holding companies, control of banks over industry, and absentee ownership; glaringly revealed the terrible cruelties and inequalities of a system the nation had unreflectingly accepted and admired; developed the social conscience, and forced a fresh vision of Democracy on America.

## § 5

Before I left Washington, I went to see the President.

Up at the White House, I sailed into a pleasant hall, sat in a comfortable arm-chair, saw a smiling gentleman who asked me for no more credentials than my name, and chatted with a lot of amiable people I didn't know. After a short wait, all of us—some sixty or seventy men and women—passed into a delightfully spacious room with tall windows

looking on sunny green lawns, and bright walls covered with coloured prints of early America. At a long flat desk, behind which hung extensively the Stars and Stripes, sat a man of middle age, well-groomed, broad-shouldered, with an air of great physical fitness, a bold curve to his shapely head, and a clean-shaven, handsome, sensitive, intelligent and complicated face. Immediately I recollected other rulers of equal significance: the theatrical truculent ugliness of Mussolini, the bawling bully; the sneering brutality and granite-like heaviness of Stalin, the ruthless peasant; the fanatical, stupid, banal countenance of Hitler, the neurotic, with its nauseating expression of deeply-embedded fear. The face in front of me was of a different essence: it was one of the most remarkably civilized faces I have ever seen.

The eyes, set rather close together, quick, keen, perceptive; the celebrated smile, now distinctly fixed and automatic, coming irrelevantly, as if due to habit or to after-thought, but very attractive and persuasive when it did remember to occur; the clear, alert, beautifully-modulated voice, the easy courteous manners and the genial forms of address—all these things had an instant effect of leaping, indefatigable vitality, of tremendous resiliency, of capacity sharp-edged and very diverse. They were stimulating to the imagination, and the senses, also, became excited by the exhilarating vigour which poured out of this dynamic man. It was impossible not to be captivated at once.

But it was impossible, too, not to grow perturbed as the conference proceeded. I never lost the impression of charm, but slowly, a feeling of disquietude mounted side by side with the enjoyment. It is very difficult to analyse why. It had nothing to do with the criticisms I had heard of the President: it was a personal intuition. Thinking it over, I am inclined to believe that its source was my realization of the abnormal rapidity and fluidity of the mind of Franklin Roosevelt. The crowd of journalists, grouped opposite him, pressing against his table, questioned him on whatever they

wished. He caught the questions, he flashed back the answers, exactly like a tennis champion striking the dancing, rushing balls on a court. Sometimes he did not choose to reply, and then the dexterity with which the interrogations were evaded or diverted, was astounding. It was evident that he was impulsive, but his impetuosity was so controlled, he was so agile and so wary, so slick, so watchful and decisive, that in fact he directed the conversations as he pleased. The more I looked at him and listened to him the more firmly my conviction took root that this magnetic individual who assembled in himself so many complex faculties, was above all a player superbly conducting a game.

This experience of the incomparable skill and nimbleness of the President clarified my picture of him. (Please note that I write: "my picture of him": the true picture of this intricate, nervous and mysterious brain is known to the Omniscient alone.) As I see it, here is a man whose heredity, education and instincts gave him a prodigiously keen taste for justice, generosity and humaneness. The drive was not overwhelming enough to constitute a vocation—by which I understand a force that in the words of the philosopher Zeno seizes a human being by the hair and compels him to assent—involving, as a vocation must, entire self-sacrifice and self-forgetfulness. But it was strong and passionate enough to lead him, when circumstances demanded that he should mobilize his energies, to concentrate on a definite goal of outstanding nobility, the establishment of a reign of social equity which would bestow freedom, opportunity, happiness, and a share in the national wealth on every one of his fellow-citizens. Certain psychological factors informed his energies with a distinctive quality. A domineering will, tremendously sharpened by the admirable and successful struggle he waged against illness and a physical infirmity which might well have destroyed the morale of a weaker man. . . . An ambition that probably was intensified by the subconscious need of compensation, but in which no Euro-

pean at least, comparing its manifestations with the manifestations of the ambition of the Continental dictators, can discern any basic unbalance or megalomania or cynicism—for it is quite logical that Roosevelt should wish to wield power as long as he can, since he feels he has grasped and can communicate the needs and hungers and aspirations of the common people, as he undoubtedly has. . . . A very exceptional zest for action, for fighting, for sheer living. . . . A sense of drama so unquenchable, so imperious that if existence itself does not provide him with crises, he is impelled to create them as a means of mental nourishment and a heightened consciousness of significance. . . . There are, of course, a host of other obvious traits in his most unsimple make-up—complete fearlessness, resourcefulness, obstinacy, tenacity, sympathy, curiosity, optimism, vanity—but the qualities I have named are, I believe, the very fabric of his character. The *perpetual* fabric, over which impulses and moods, good and bad, come and go like water passes on and flows off a rock.

So much for the composition of this immensely talented player. The motive of his game cannot ever be questioned, so plain and so consistent is his disinterested desire for a larger and more fortunate life in which all will participate. The nature of the game consisted, not in the construction of a new system—he is not an architect, he is preponderantly a broker of ideas—but first in the salvaging, and next in the correcting, for the common welfare, of the system in which he had been reared and which he genuinely believes could operate satisfactorily on behalf of the whole population if its worst abuses were abolished. To give it the chance to operate satisfactorily he battled unceasingly and unsparingly.

But the results were nothing like what he had hoped. He encountered a formidable opposition and hindrance to his plans, which sprang from the history, the geography, the set-up of America; from the Constitution, the legislative machinery, the gigantic vested interests; from traditions,

habits, and the temper of the people. The methods he invented or approved were improvisations and often paradoxes. His own grave psychological defects militated against him: impatience, versatility, disingenuousness, an inordinate desire to win applause, to conciliate public opinion, to be everything to everybody at once, love of the limelight, the queerest mixture of the messianic complex and the prima donna complex, and a redoubtable aptitude for jettisoning without a qualm theories and followers when he found it convenient. Though it would be absurd to the point of dementia to mention his reprisals, which consist in scathing words or swift dismissals or intrigues to eliminate adversaries, in the same breath as the reprisals of a Stalin, a Hitler or a Mussolini, it cannot be denied that his personal animosities and resentments got entangled with his impersonal indignation against vicious institutions. He is an unforgetting and an unforgiving man, and none is safe with him who cannot offer adulation and submission. The inner dispositions of the President combined with external obstacles to handicap him in his game and will prevent it, I am afraid, from ending in victory, though he himself persists in both his idealism and his determination to go forward, and his high purpose and dauntless resolution have not altered at all.

The purpose is really so high, and the resolution is really so dauntless that they alone, totally apart from ultimate triumph or failure, might have given him in the eyes of his contemporaries and of posterity the stature of a hero. If he has not acquired it, if, as I think, he will not acquire it, it is because of his tactics. His actions are those of the politician. One of the most astute in existence. One of the most expert and the most Protean. There is not a twist or turn of the politician's technique that he ignores or refuses to resort to—not a feint, not a subtlety, not a shift. He employs every kind of artifice, device, manœuvre, expedient, pressure and henchman. His goal is inflexible, yes—but his march towards it is the most devious imaginable and on the road to

his inflexible goal are now lying, in mounds, changes of procedure, reversals of policy, violated promises, discarded pledges, abandoned principles and forsaken friends. To reach his dream he uses not a highway but a maze, and to bring it to materialization, means that are not wicked, assuredly, but commonplace, stale, worn and devoid of any resurgence of morality. This cannot astonish anybody, certainly not in America, where politics were always superlatively crooked—and anyhow I suppose that in these times no one except the inmate of a lunatic asylum, afflicted with delusions, fancies that rectitude is worth while—but neither can it excite whole-hearted respect. Franklin Roosevelt fully deserves to be liked, to be admired, on many points to be esteemed, and to be fervently commended to all the Democratic gods for his general endeavour, but it is not possible to put in him an enduring faith and to yield one's conscience to his leadership. For in spite of his magnificent gifts and lofty purpose, an essential coherence is missing in him—perhaps that indefinable quality of spiritual integrity which in the last analysis is the only permanent force in the world.



## CHAPTER V

### A MISCELLANY

#### § I

EVERYBODY I met in Washington, when they learnt I meant to travel through the principal States of the Union, lavishly helped me to plan my itinerary, so extraordinary did they think it was that a European should wish to see America before commenting on her. Everybody gave me letters of introduction for persons they knew. More and more did I marvel, not only at the miraculous kindness of this people, who cheerfully take any amount of pains for strangers they will never encounter again, but at the number of relatives and friends Americans possess all over their country, and at the readiness with which these friends, in their turn, accept the responsibility of entertaining and orientating their unexpected visitors. Never did an American fail to come up to the mark. Never did I stay in a town without acquiring, a few hours after my arrival, a cordial little group of acquaintances. Never was I made to feel burdensome or lonely. Oh, dear! What horrid, rude, selfish, suspicious, parsimonious, conceited people we are compared to Americans! Why they like us I cannot understand. I departed from Washington with a portfolio of missives addressed to governors, senators, professors, doctors, journalists, labour leaders, civil servants, social workers, ministers, industrialists, chambers of commerce, farmers, keepers of hot-dog stations. I was given points of contact with every stratum in the United States, and the railway companies thought out all my side-trips with incredible exactness and economy. They also furnished me with a circular letter for

their agents, so that porters, guards, inspectors, looked after me like angels. As a social observer, I was going to have the happiest and easiest time in my life. Then, on the very first lap of this most carefully planned and exciting journey, up in smoke went all my innocent and lovely schemes.

If I followed my burning inclination I would tell you reams and reams about the cause of this busting-up. But I cannot follow my burning inclination, for it seems that when you disclose the truth concerning facts English law regards it as libel. So for the present I must put into cold storage the reams and reams I'd like to write. Anyhow, what happened was that I was given vicious trouble about the thing I love best in the world, and although I managed to stave off the putrid affair for some time, it reached such proportions at last that I was obliged to take it into the French courts and, to do so, return to Europe before I had finished my American trip. My original programme of travelling through all the States and describing them by regions was cut short, and if the months I spent on the road were sufficient to give me a grasp of the great preoccupations and issues in America, of national institutions, and of the fundamental American characteristics and ways of living, they were not enough to enable me to paint a detailed picture of the colossal sections of the New World.<sup>1</sup> This study, which was to have been an analysis, must become a synthesis. I shall go back one day to America and write the travel book I had in mind from the start, but now all I can concoct is a disquisition. The gaps in this volume must therefore be ascribed exclusively to the author of the vicious trouble brought upon me, and though eventually I won my case against him, I hope that every

<sup>1</sup> Of course, I know something about all of them, otherwise I should not have been able to write this volume. But each deserves an entirely separate study of its own: the North-east, which I did not like, in spite of its historical and economic importance, the South, so intensely American that I loved it immediately more than any other region, though I was saddened and shocked there; the psychologically unstable West, so hospitable and fascinating, the highly vital and difficult Middle-west, out of which will come, perhaps, the definite American pattern. Not to mention the South-west and the North-west. But what a job, to tackle such a country!

reader who is irritated or disappointed by my failure to do justice to America will join me in consigning him to a vat of boiling tar in the nethermost circle of hell. And *that's* being nicer to him than he deserves.

## § 2

Reading over the few notes I took on the way—few because I cannot look and talk and react and write all together: how I envy the people who do!—I find that on three or four points practically the same observations recur constantly. So I'll get them off my chest at once. They have to do with trains, hotels, reporters, and the scenery.

Trains and I became very close acquaintances. They are divided into day coaches (inferior class), and Pullmans (superior class), and in a good many respects they are better than ours. Both classes have amenities of which we are deprived in Europe: wide seats, clean lavatories, iced drinking-water that you enjoy in little cardboard cups—as many of them as you like, the companies offer them to you free; scores of vendors selling you newspapers, coca cola, a dreadfully sickly drink supposed to contain a mild stimulant, to which you become inexplicably and perversely addicted, in common with the entire American nation, beer, sandwiches, fruit; and the divine advantage, on several lines, of fuel without smoke. In neither class can you indulge in tobacco unless you repair to a special and usually very dingy compartment, nor can you lie down, nor can you embark on conversations with your fellow passengers—for, contrary to their ordinary custom and to the custom of autobus travellers in particular, Americans in trains keep themselves strictly to themselves. You might be in England for all the response you get to friendly overtures: I never understood the why and wherefore of this attitude, which baffles one in a country so naturally genial and talkative. The Pullmans are com-

fortable by day, well-heated in winter, air-conditioned in summer, but most disconcerting at night. Suddenly the whole long carriage is converted into a public dormitory with wide beds in lower and higher rows, shut off by curtains. Men and women sleep in them higgledy-piggledy, and as the curtains are rarely closed hermetically you catch involuntarily glimpses, as you go up and down the corridor, of one of the most unlovely spectacles under the sun: the adult human animal asleep. Since there is no privacy, you have to dress and undress on your berth, and until you've tried it, you can have no idea how awkward and difficult the process is. If you have a top bunk, you can't reach it or leave it unless you ring for the negro attendant to bring you a ladder—which he carries off again the moment you've ascended or descended, so that if you suffer from any sort of digestive upset you spend the night frantically summoning a strange man to whom you perforce confide your innermost troubles. Our small European sleeping compartments are much more discreet and decent. The washrooms, quite different from ours, are luxurious, with unlimited towels and such refinements as special taps for tooth-brushing—but you can't lock the doors; they just swing; and anybody, negro guard included, can barge in while you are engaged in your ablutions. That seemed, however, to worry no one except myself. Indeed, all through my journey I was shocked by the lack of modesty of the American women. The way in which they strip themselves naked in front of onlookers (it is no excuse that the onlookers are also women), publicly perform intimate rites, even operate in the water-closet without bothering to shut the door, scandalized me. It's all right to be sensible about one's body, but it's perfectly unnecessary to display all its physical functions, as American women do without a qualm. There is a queer, subconscious, disquieting taste for exhibitionism in lots of them. The food in the train restaurants is indifferent, though nectar and ambrosia compared with the fare on some English railways; the car con-

ductors and station-masters are singularly helpful and polite, and the baggage services excellent : rapid, precise and honest. It is very easy to travel in America, and, considering the vast distances, surprisingly cheap.

Now for hotels, of which I sampled scores. Speaking from the point of view of a modest purse, which could not run to suites, I found that without exception they give the traveller a very fair return for his money. The quite average rooms that were all my devalued francs permitted me to rent, each had a bathroom attached to it; good sensible lighting; pleasing wall-colours; plenty of hanging-space; and an astonishingly lavish supply of linen—too lavish, in fact, for my European notions of economy : it really pained me to see that the maids changed a towel whenever I had used it once. You take your telephone receiver off its hook, and get everything you ask for : a restaurant, a laundry, a dry-cleaner, a valet, though I warn you that all of them clap prices on their work which are considerably higher than those of the town shops. Still, you need not resort to them save in an emergency. Service is brisk, but not noteworthy for thoroughness except if you make a long sojourn. In that case your room is overhauled every month by specialists who varnish the furniture, put up fresh curtains and scrub everything inside out. There are numerous conveniences that the European hotels don't dream of providing you with : a shower bath, iced water, a radio, an electric fan, a letter chute, a basket of fruit on feast days, and a Christmas-tree on the twenty-fourth of December. (At that time, moreover, there are Christmas-trees erected in the principal streets of all the great towns : an enchanting custom.)

The American hotels—there are no inns—are all constructed on an identical pattern and show the same social habits. Big or small, they always have a lounge, an immense hall besprinkled with circulating libraries where you hire by the day all the newest novels and detective stories, and neat gay little booths which sell cigarettes, post cards, papers,

stamps, souvenirs for tourists, bags and shoes and frocks and hats. In this lounge you can sit for ever and ever. Often you are treated to orchestral music, by the hotel band, to say nothing of the news and programmes incessantly poured out by the powerful hotel wireless. You can also watch the people flocking to the hotel restaurant, or its bar, or its ball-room, or its clubroom, for every self-respecting hotel sustains a never-ceasing round of gaieties: dinners, lunches, teas, dances, and lectures ranging from cuisine, beauty culture, sex appeal, yogi, to art, philosophy, astronomy, economics. These lectures are attended—in her millions—by the resolute and purposeful American woman who thinks to achieve “culture” by swallowing the mental processes of others, just as the Arab woman thinks to achieve blessedness by swallowing a strip of paper on which is inscribed a verse from the Koran. I am told that the hotels also possess an official staff of prostitutes, who are rung up when their services are required, but such transactions take place between the “bell-captain” or the “hop-boys” and the male clients, so I cannot veraciously say that I witnessed them. The lounge, moreover, is open to everybody, guests and non-guests, and it is used as a public square. You drift into it and you drift out of it, pausing perhaps to enter a “rest-room,” for that, too, is gratuitously at your disposal, whoever you may be. (Thank heaven it is, otherwise every other soul in America would expire of a burst bladder. The municipalities, evidently convinced it is criminal to want to urinate, won’t hear of building proper little houses for the horrid needs of citizens.) You come in at one door and you go out of the other, just for the rapture, it seems, of the tour. You can even take the elevator—lift—and ascend and descend until the last trump if you are so minded. No one interferes with any of your peregrinations or your immobilities, except tiny boys with huge voices who “page,” that is, wander through halls and corridors and restaurants like lost spirits, wailing a name like Irish banshees, till, falling into the abyss of

despair over which they obviously hovered from their very first outbreak of keening, they mercifully disappear together with their blood-curdling lament.

Drawbacks to the American hotels are: (*a*) they clap a fine on every meal you order upstairs, an extremely irritating extortion; (*b*) neither for love nor for money will they clean your shoes, which, poor pathetic innocents, droop on your threshold vainly appealing for attention; (*c*) they let your neighbour's radio bray all through the night into the small hours of the morning; and, lastly, (*d*) each winter they determinedly attempt to kill you off in a particularly barbaric fashion, for their heating-system is specifically designed to make every drop of moisture in your body boil up and over. It is futile to hope you can frustrate their murderous intentions by manœuvring the radiator taps: there are dozens of uncontrollable pipes concealed in cupboards and bathroom. No; I've tried everything, and I assure you that the only way in which you can avoid dying by ebullition in an American hotel is to open all the windows and ventilators and die of pneumonia. But on the whole they are very much cleaner, brighter and more comfortable than their European confrères, and they distinctly score over the English hotels, which are dirty-minded, in that they do not assume *a priori* that you possess an incurable propensity to fornication, and so do not insultingly object to your receiving masculine visitors in your bedroom.

Reporters. . . . Perhaps because I once belonged to the press myself, perhaps because I really am a bit of a snob intellectually, I have always drawn a heavy line of demarcation between journalists proper and reporters. For me, journalists proper are the people who write reasoned analyses and expositions of political and social situations, national policies and public issues. They are directly responsible for their interpretations and opinions. Reporters are the people who write about battlefields, floods, fires, earthquakes, crimes, marriages, sports and fashions, and are strictly pro-

hibited from having any ideas of their own. American journalists are no whit different from European journalists, and represent the same varying levels of talent and judgment, with this fact in their favour—that in foreign affairs generally (mind: I only say “foreign affairs”) they are allowed by their papers to express themselves with an amazing liberty. British journalism is influenced by a long tradition of co-operation with the Foreign Office, by the monstrous complexity of the libel laws, by the private views of the great newspaper owners. The French press, which allows itself to be subsidized to a scandalous extent by the Ministère de l’Intérieur, by large business corporations, political factions and foreign Governments, ranks relatively low in honesty, though very high in intelligence. But the American press is incomparably freer from international entanglements, and its outstanding organs—the stable, trustworthy ones, not the tabloids, compared with which even the most disgraceful of our *feuilles de chou* are works of genius—have at present a batch of correspondents in Europe who are about the most illuminating political journalists in the world, not only from the point of view of documentation and analytical penetration, but from that of a complete fearlessness of appreciation. So much so that one must cross over to America to rightly learn what goes on behind the European scenes.

The reporters are another pair of shoes. They are reputed, everywhere, to be lower than a snake’s belly. Familiar, pushing, intolerably indiscreet, unspeakably vulgar, they are held responsible for the debased sensationalism of which so many American newspapers reek. I do not dispute the justice of this opinion, which is world-wide. But I like to get to the root of things, and I wonder whether the attitude reporters flaunt is due to the quality of their own minds, or to the quality of the mind of the greater portion of the American public. Undoubtedly some of the worst culprits in this bad business are the politicians, officials, and



public figures generally. They have such a cringing desire to be on the right side of newspaper men that they give them outrageous privileges: I can truthfully say that reporters are welcomed in through the front door in America when in Europe they still wouldn't be able to show their noses in the tradesman's entrance. It isn't in human nature to resist the temptation to abuse one's privileges; the Fourth Estate, never naturally inclined to shyness and modesty, encouraged in every way to insist on its importance and to pass from the rôle of transmitting news to that of building up or throwing down personalities, quickly developed into an obstreperous bully. That's one reason for its frequently atrocious tone. Another reason is, much as I dislike to say it, that in the United States, the newspaper-reading public seems to consist in vaster numbers than anywhere else, of ignorant and silly people, devoid of taste and dignity, panting for the cheapest, commonest, shoddiest sort of melodrama, violence and sentimentality. They also appear to require that the news should be served up to them in an incorrect, distorted and telescoped language. My conviction is that the standards of the press are set by the nation, and that no newspaper man would dare to foist muck on readers unless there was a popular demand for it. It is useless to deny that the public in America has an exorbitant and insatiable appetite for sensational tripe: it gulps it down and loves it. The reporters are the cooks appointed to prepare it, and as competition is particularly fierce, and the methods of hiring and firing particularly arbitrary and brutal, either they prepare it the way the public likes it, or they are flung out. It looks to me like a case of the tail wagging the dog.

What confirms me in this view is my personal experience of reporters. It was invariably pleasant. I gave more interviews in a few months in America than in all the rest of my years put together, and I found the "news-hawks" always polite, intelligent, reasonable, and beautifully rapid. They were not a bit malicious. Their notes were accurate, their

"pieces" eminently readable, and, touched by my evident lack of sophistication—how Americans adore that word!—they bestowed upon me good and friendly advice for making the best of myself from the publicity angle. I used to part from them on excellent terms. It was when the interviews were published that I got a shock. The articles *qua* articles were quite all right, and often very sympathetic, but the titles were so awful that they made my hair stand on my head. It was as if the writer of a sane and interesting column had suddenly gone mad after concluding it, and stuck a lunatic headline on its top. This lunatic headline was ordinarily a lurid and misleading exaggeration of some incidental, casual remark which had been picked out from the whole connected thing, and presented to readers in Americanese—and in enormous capital letters at that. For instance, if I had happened to mention, in the course of a comparison between the French and the American "art of living"—not that there is much "art of living" left now in France—that it was possible for the French to be happy without certain amenities like iceboxes, I'd read: "*French Author Says Aim Of American Civilization Is Refrigerator.*" Or, after a conversation dealing with the qualities, good and bad, which had struck me most in American women, this astounding announcement: "*European Writer States Better End Race Than Marry American Woman.*" It took me a long time to discover that it was not the reporter who had abruptly lost his senses. The reporter is under the thumb of the editor; the editor is under the thumb of the proprietor; the proprietor is out for money; the money comes from the public, and the public's predominant objective is to be titillated by any kind of means. I repeat that, in the last analysis, it is the public that is guilty of the vulgarity and sensationalism of the press, exactly as it is guilty of the imbecility and maudlin sentimentality of the cinema.

I wish, for my own satisfaction, that I could clear up as positively what I felt with regard to scenery during my

voyage. That there are any amount of places in America—mountains, gorges, forests, parks, rivers, plains—which are stupendously grandiose and beautiful and strange, and that the effect of immensity and solitariness is constantly dramatic and overwhelming are only truisms. As I write, there arise in my mind pictures that take my breath away—of nature so superb or wild or hostile or alluring as to be beyond my capacity to describe its spell and its power. There are innumerable parts of the American continent which are as entrancing as anything in Europe, as mysterious as anything in Africa, as prodigious as anything in Asia, and parts so utterly fantastic that they belong to the realm of pure wizardry. In all the places where America preserves her great pristine forms, she inspires unforgettable awe or admiration. And yet, when I close my eyes to evoke my most familiar vision of that land of sumptuous sites and titanic features, what I first see is invariably stretch after stretch of repellent hideousness. It is only in spots that America's splendour comes back to me. Habitually I think of her, *en bloc*, as the ugliest country I know.

I attribute my bitter disappointment partly to my own foolishness, for I should have realized that since America is a continent there could not be, over her formidable expanse, the continuity of beauty that exists in so many of the relatively tiny European States. If you strike an unlovely belt in America, the chances are that you won't be out of it for days and days, while in a European country you usually leave a strip of ugliness behind your train or your car in a few hours. But mainly the unsightliness of America is due to the Americans. No land in the world has been as ravaged, mutilated, disfigured, by the human beings who settled on it, as America has been by the European colonists, by the American pioneers and business men, by the urban population and by the rural population, each group spoiling her in its own way. Necessity; ignorance; exploiting greed; a quasi-universal lack of discrimination, orderliness, and of the

instinct for art—these things led to an incredible defilement and defacement of the earth. There are States where an obstinate Anglo-Saxon tradition—the New England corner—put a fascinating and enduring mark on architecture and cultivation; Southern States where in the past economic conditions permitted the development of a refined and harmonious taste, still visible in the old houses and properties; States, especially in the South-west and West, where not even human savagery or vulgarity could ruin the transcendent magnificence of the natural setting.

But generally speaking the Americans, particularly in the nineteenth century, massacred America. The land, wherever it is beautiful, is beautiful in spite of them, not because of them. The great companies hacked and ripped open whole districts for the extraction of minerals, and, having looted them, left them desolate, poisoned, dead. The settlers and the business men together wore out the forests, slashed and felled the gorgeous trees, exposed the crests of the mountains, worked havoc by fire and uncontrolled cutting, and swept on without replanting. The farmers exhausted immense regions through intensive exploitation of cash crops, stupidity, laziness or rapacity; they allowed the water, by the action of erosion, to slash and gash and scar the soil and finally to carry it entirely away. I felt physically sick as I went past those unforgivably dishevelled wastes, those endless miles of ravined, gullied, plundered, naked land—and, growing superstitious, would mutter to myself in alarm: "One day a Judgment will overtake this people. They have had so much; they have used it so recklessly. How long, in a world where powerful nations are stifling within their too-close boundaries, will such insensate squandering be tolerated as a right?" For I am obsessed by the importance of land, since I come from Europe, where every square foot of arable soil is as precious as a gem, watched over and cared for with the knowledge that if it is lost it can never be replaced; and where the needs and resentments of countries determined to expand are the

deadliest menace. . . . I am accustomed to see the earth loved and respected and understood; to Man working as diligently as he can with Nature, adapting the crops to the soil rather than violently trying to adapt the soil to the crops he has chosen purely for gain; and to a patient and careful utilization of all the factors of fertility. To the marrow of my bones I was shocked by the brutal depletion, the desecration, and the wild tossing away of land in America. My surmise is that all the international wars waged in Europe since the Fall of the Roman Empire—and there were a good few of them!—did not do as much damage to the European soil as the Americans managed to inflict in three centuries on their own earth.

The massacring of the forests, the unchecked floods, the crazy exhausting of the land for commercial purposes, are all bad enough, but the greatest evil, the most potent agent of destruction is water-erosion, with which hardly anybody coped until the advent of the Roosevelt Administration. Statistics prove the staggering fact that America is not a permanent country; that another century of the present processes would leave her unable to maintain the agriculture on which her civilization rests; and that she is on the way to join those decadent or dead parts of China, Mesopotamia and Asia Minor, which were once opulent, and are now stripped for ever of their productivity. Of the total surface of the United States—1,903,000,000 acres—over 5 per cent has already been rendered irremediably inapt for cultivation; sheet and shoe-string erosion are in progress in 44.9 of the whole acreage, and gully erosion, the most dangerous form, in 45 per cent. One-third to three-fourths of the top-soil has been completely lost in 34.8 per cent, and three-fourths of the top-soil and part of the subsoil in 10 per cent! At present 400,000,000 dollars are lost every year by the wastage of the earth, the annual rate is increasing, and the cumulative loss is conservatively stated as not less than 10 billion dollars. If this earth-wastage is not stopped, in another

fifty years the cumulative loss will be 25 to 30 billion dollars, equivalent to the loss of 4 thousand dollars on each and every farm in America. It was the Roosevelt Administration that first woke up to these terrifying realities and plunged resolutely into action. Through the Department of Agriculture, Forestry, the Resettlement Administration and C.C.C. included, through the Soil Conservation Service, the T.V.A. and other branches, it has been conducting an indefatigable campaign and sounding the alarm all over the country. Every means of educating the public is being employed: propaganda, demonstration, new agricultural methods, as well as the construction of chains of colossal dams. The assumptions which constitute the basis of the movement are that the national resources of a country—minerals, soil, forests, waters—are not the possession of one generation alone but the inheritance of all the future generations of the people to whom that country belongs. Such a conception has only just begun to dawn upon Americans, fascinated too long by the epic of the settler, the pioneer, the frontiersman, the robber-baron, who bequeathed to their descendants, together with qualities of great courage and self-reliance, the philosophy and procedure of the brigand.

The main highways, of which the Americans are so legitimately proud, are superb, with enormously broad and smooth surfaces, first-rate grading and banking, careful and elaborate signs, and an animation that surpasses anything you see in Europe. Restless America is always moving, and the great roads have a population of their own. At every step, almost, you get hotels and eating-houses; hot-dog stands; filling-stations (where service is so prompt, so thorough, and so polite that you can't believe it is true; do you know, those brisk uniformed lads, having filled your tank, bring you water, tend your radiator, rub your windshield clean and do little repairs for nothing! Why, they do little repairs for nothing even when you *haven't bought petrol!* All the stations have maps, and take a great deal of trouble

to help you with your route. "Come again," they say, as they speed you off. But don't offer them tips; these men are as good and free as you, and they know it); trim competent patrols; groups of astonishingly healthy C.C.C. boys ditching and levelling and planting; tramps, hoboes, out-of-works, who lift a thumb to make you stop and transport them, too (I don't advise you to if you are driving alone: your passenger might attack you); auto-camps, where you can rent a room or an entire cottage with electric light, a bath, a kitchen. Since the Depression, the movement on the roads has increased enormously; to the ordinary seasonal workers, migrating from State to State in search of agricultural jobs with their ragged families and miserable belongings in incredibly tumbledown Fords, have been added the farmers, leaving their sold-up or dust- or drought-devastated lands for small Government-given holdings, and hordes of people driven to travel through unemployment or the impossibility of paying their taxes on real estate.

This is a novel phase and an extremely curious one. You dispose of your house and furniture and buy a motor caravan—there is everything in a motor caravan, like in a tiny ship—and off you go up and down America. No more taxes, no more rent, no more State impositions, no more this or that municipal fleecing. Indeed, the tables have been turned on the municipalities, for in the interests of hygiene they have been compelled to set apart tracts for parking, with drains, plumbing, water and electricity all complete—but unless you stay there for a long time, you don't disburse anything, and even if you do stay there a long time, you disburse only a dollar a month. Think of it: only a dollar a month, and you the owner of a neat little house on wheels, cocking a snook at the municipalities! My soul expands with the joy of it. Last year, over a million new motor caravans were sold to Americans, and life on the roads is becoming an intensely amusing and instructive social phenomenon. One could write a most illuminating book on America simply by studying the modern

highway and its people, and if I were capable of driving by myself, I'd have acquired a caravan then and there. But I'm such an ass with machines, I can't even steer a wheelbarrow properly, so I've had to renounce the idea of producing an American Don Quixote.

All over the country, the new bridges are marvels, not only from the standpoint of technical construction, but of line. The same goes for the dams, which America is building in great numbers, landscaping all around with admirable effectiveness. These titanic engineering works, beside which the skyscrapers of New York are nothing but tricky temporary toys, stunned me by their grandeur. They did more. After having stunned me, they gave me my first clear intimation of the way in which the American genius is moving and of what will perhaps be its ultimate specific expression. Mind you, it was only an intimation, but it was an immense relief to feel something sharply among the masses and masses of confused impressions which the country had hitherto produced in my mind.

I looked at the majestic faces of the dams, at their colossal walls, lofty, noble, enduring, beautiful through the sheer austerity of their straight lines, their unbroken surfaces, their pure cold colour; at the fine plain cubes of the grey power-houses; at the substations, intricate, exquisite stiffened pieces of suspended lace, all slender white lines and black insulators like stitches; at the great thick-set cableway towers, sturdy and massive sentinels standing on guard; at the newly created cataracts and the storage lakes, hundreds of miles of bold and ample curves, with woods that clothe the slopes in a close and vivid garment and dark green shadows massed profoundly in the tranquil steel-blue waters; at the wide handsome roads and the fruitful fields and pastures on each side—Norris Dam, Wilson Dam, Boulder Dam, and many others. I saw myriads of men at work, electricians, riggers, mechanics, quarrymen, woodsmen, drillers, grouters, carpenters, concrete layers, labourers



of every kind, running across the earth like ants, climbing the huge scaffoldings like lizards, swinging in mid-air like bees—all obedient to an inconceivably mighty rhythm and order. I caught a glimpse of the play of tremendous forces, of mechanics and hydraulics, of balances of stresses, strains and pressures, of perfect exactness in the movements of locks, sluices, switches and spillways—and of the highly complicated and innumerable diverse processes that intertwine to achieve at last a stupendous smooth and whole result: excavating, rock drilling and blasting, filling, floating of barges, towing, mixing of materials, transferring, handling of power lines, building in height. I gazed at the environs of some of the giant dams: villages with gardens, electrified homes, community centres with auditoriums and libraries, clubs, schools, tennis-courts, swimming-pools, co-operatives. And it came upon me that all this was perhaps the beginning of the new world of which America would set the example. Over against the old, brutal, greedy, wasteful, disorderly individualism of the old capitalistic system; over against the monstrously despotic State of the modern totalitarian countries, that terrorizing, slave-making, soul-destroying abstraction in Russia, Germany, Italy—perhaps America is starting to erect the conception of a free collective humanity. Those works which filled me with wonder and awe were the early vision of what, inspired by communal planning, man could one day accomplish. Uniting all the resources of science, the multifarious inventions of the races, carried out in liberty for the good of all, impersonal yet fraternal, enterprises such as these may well be the saving pattern of the future. I am always repeating that America is leading up to something and taking us there, too. My hope is that the magnificent, nameless, disinterested large-scale organizations in the United States, that marshal and integrate the assets of a region, plan its development, ameliorate its standards of living, establish it in a permanent security, render available to all its people the benefits of its beauty and its wealth and the

results of a universal knowledge and a universal activity, are the embryo of what the whole world will become in time.<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to what I felt with regard to roads, bridges, dams and comprehensive communal achievements, urbanism in America did not move me to admiration. Far from it. For the sake of simplification, I'll divide the towns I saw into three categories. (a) The little old-world ports and cities, of direct English and early Colonial origin, sprinkled principally over the New England States of the North-east and to a lesser extent over the South, which still retain an intimate, very individual, often freakish charm. They delighted my European eyes inexpressibly. Not because I went sentimental or nostalgic, but because of their intrinsic qualities of rightness, proportion, orderliness, harmony, colour, whimsicality, and because they possess what America in general lacks most: meaning and character. If you visit, for instance, Williamsburg in Virginia (resurrected by the Rockefellers), a tiny but perfect example of what the country was in its colonial culture and art and way of living, you will understand my happy pleasure.

(b) The small-sized towns which are modern. There are legions and legions and yet more legions of them. They meet you with a passionate scream for your custom, with a blazing, vociferous brightness of variegated lights, insistent and facetious posters, neon signs, filling-stations, drug-stores, interspersed with tin shacks, rickety huts, and any amount of dump-heaps and waste-places. Then

<sup>1</sup> If you want to get an idea of what large-scale organizations are doing in the United States, and of the implications of their performances, read a little book called *A Foreigner Looks at the TVA*. It is by me, and the best thing I've ever written. The T.V.A. is the most representative of all the new communal institutions and the model of a sound and sane construction which, beginning in one region, is liable to expand into a system that will co-ordinate and integrate an entire country. I believe there is nothing like it at present in the world, for though communal enterprises are rife in Russia, they are carried out in injustice, coercion, terror and an unparalleled inhumanity, at the cost of the complete sacrifice of ordinary human happiness—besides being mainly inefficient—while the T.V.A. is conducting its incomparably beneficent experiments within the constitutional frame the nation itself elected to build.

come a few main streets, laid out geometrically and enlivened by trees, and clusters of shops, cinemas, and cheerful villas which flaunt all the newest gadgets. But this core quickly tails off into dingy lanes and dreary "frame" houses of thin unpainted wood, all dreadfully unfinished, devoid of continuity and compactness, straggling away into an untidy, down-at-heels indefiniteness. You take the whole place in at a glance; there is no distinctiveness about it, nothing to remember; when you've seen one American small town, you've seen them all. They haven't the close, familiar, relevant charm of the village, nor the exciting diversity of the megalopolis; what they look like, rather, is an infinitesimal, shrill, silly bit of a true city, cut off from its parent, with untrimmed edges, and casually dropped in the immensities of the land. I was continually haunted by the notion that they were neither quite real nor quite substantial. Partly this is due to their buildings, which are usually made of wood instead of stone and so appear flimsy, partly to the fact that you encounter chains of dead little cities, especially in the West, but mostly to their atmosphere. You feel they are only temporary things. In spite of all their inhabitants say and do to boost them, a deep-seated connection between the people and the place is missing. Some organic attachment, the attachment that makes the European cling to the spot he has chosen, invest it with associations and loyalties that survive its vicissitudes, is missing here. You sense that the day these agglomerations cease to be a paying proposition, they will be deserted, and it seemed to me that both the nomadic and purely utilitarian elements of the American character were combined, at their worst and most blatant, in these small towns which have nothing essential to give.

(c) The big city in America is what the big city is everywhere in the twentieth century—a horrendously tangled and complex mass, senselessly laid out without regard to topography or function, formless and unclarified, overpopulated, over-congested, inadequate in every way to the

demands of traffic, at once luxurious and squalidly diseased, infested by factories, degraded by slums, dirty, noisy, mephitic, altogether unhygienic, and in the bulk, totally and irremediably unbeautiful. There is naught to choose between the American megalopolis and the European megalopolis in these respects. The difference resides elsewhere. The big European towns score overwhelmingly over the big American towns in historical interest, in architecture and monuments distinctive of great periods, and, because of their excessively long evolution and centuries-old accretions, in picturesqueness. Of all these factors the American towns are practically bereft, for most of them grew on sites which are not romantic or noble (San Francisco is a gorgeous exception), their vestiges of art are exclusively Colonial, and meagre at that—the country scrapped its legacies too indiscriminately—their reminiscences go back only for a hundred years or so, and are connected with events which are pale and provincial in comparison with the rise and extinction of civilizations in Europe and the huge invasions and convulsions of her stupendously dramatic past. On the other hand, the majority of the big American towns possess a feature which is a startling surprise to the European: purely residential areas (not suburbs) separated from the city by park spaces, and ravishingly lovely as to houses, decoration, and gardens. Socially, of course, the contrast they oppose to the tenements of the proletariat in the North-east and to the foul quarters of huddled rotting wooden shacks where the “poor Whites” and the Negroes are lodged in the South, is revolting, but from the point of view of the passing traveller these gay, attractive, healthy habitations, surrounded by trees and flowers, with free silken stretches of green sward rolling down to the very edge of the street sidewalks, appear delectable in the extreme. Moreover, there exists in America a strong tendency that runs counter to the general rush towards the megalopolis (it is taking form in Europe also in the guise of the “garden city”): a movement to establish planned settle-

ments in the open country, divided into industrial, commercial, communal and dwelling districts. In the T.V.A., the Columbia River development, the scattered "greenbelt" towns of the Resettlement Administration, these modern mutations, which all presuppose regional planning, are manifest and mean in the future—but only in the far future, I am afraid—the transformation of the small city from what it is to-day, the helpless satellite of a closed, ogreish, inhuman metropolis, into the open nucleus of an economic and geographical region. As for the big American town, the very fact that it is infinitely less fraught with significance than its European equivalent will make easier a reconstruction in which the economy, flexibility and intelligence of modern architecture will be utilized. If the housing developments of the last ten years—of which the Ten Eyck Houses in Brooklyn, N.Y., are a striking example—are continued, and the Government drive for low-cost building is maintained, the chances are that the present pathology of megalopolitan culture will be checked more quickly than in Europe and that, abandoning the flat triviality and meaninglessness of the small towns and the chaos and impotence of the great towns, American urbanism will sooner become a "collective work of art."

### § 3

Something, as I travelled, had been growing at the back of my mind, and suddenly it came to a head.

"Philip," I said explosively, "I'd like, for once, to go off at a tangent."

"Your statements," replied Philip, "are distressingly inaccurate. It is not for once that you'd like to go off at a tangent. You are always wanting to go off at a tangent. What I suggest is that, for once, you should stick to the point."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, let me write my book as I choose!" I exclaimed crossly. "You've already bullied me into making

it too serious. This thing will have no sale. Since it won't sell, I might as well indulge in a discussion that interests me. Besides, the discussion has its origin in another general observation about Americans. It ought to appeal to you particularly, Philip. It is Spiritual."

"Spiritual?" repeated Philip with heavy sarcasm. "This is indeed a remarkable departure from your usual preoccupations. Can contact with Americans have produced in you the wish to enter at last on the Strait and Narrow Path? If so, by all means go ahead and explain why and how America has inclined your soul to the practice of the Beatitudes. I have an idea that such a development will come as a surprise to your readers, Americans included."

Philip, however, is not the only one to have ideas. I too have an idea that one day, if I live long enough, I shall revert to the Beatitudes out of sheer despair at being unable to discover any other system of ethics which can pull the human species out of its abyss of bestiality and perversity. But the time is not yet ripe. In saying that the dissertation I have in mind has to do with spiritual issues I did not mean that my stay in the United States regenerated me mystically. On the contrary, in a way it starved me. The impact upon me of the American atmosphere was both profound and lasting, but it had nothing to do with an increase of spirituality. Primarily, the American atmosphere turned out to be a tonic for my nerves. It was quite impossible for a human being as set as I am in basic dispositions and opinions, to be influenced by the American traits which were not naturally congenial to me. I did not acquire in America a tittle more ambition, hustlingness, desire for material success or social popularity, than I had had in my own place. I continued to detest self-advertisement, exhibitionism, mental laziness, facile gushing enthusiasm, excessive gregariousness, vulgarity of personal standards, laxness of civic standards, the brutal expression of racial prejudice. These things had always repelled me, and they went on repelling me. But there was a different set of

American traits which corresponded to my individual tastes, and their vigour and abundance were such that they fortified these tastes as never before, in no other country. Courage, self-reliance, optimism, simplicity of approach, generosity, hospitality, warm-heartedness, good-will, the lack of ingrained suspiciousness—the bulk of the people possess and propagate these qualities in such a manner that I too was caught up in their emanations and benefited by them. I was also immensely stimulated intellectually. The European democracies to-day exude mental staleness and emotional listlessness. The fundamental topics we discuss are exactly half a dozen; they are invariable; they form a circle from which we cannot escape: Fascism, Communism, a policy of definite opposition to the Dictators, a policy of incessant conciliation towards the Dictators, the inevitableness of war, the possible staving-off of war. All the other subjects are secondary, for however important they may be to us personally, they derive from these primordial sources. Our private difficulties, worries, apprehensions, crashes, lead back inexorably to those cursed six mainsprings. We should have less virulent Labour and colonial trouble if it were not for Communism; fewer dangers to face if it were not for Fascism; more bearable taxes if it were not for re-armament; less shattering financial, commercial and professional insecurity if it were not for the international situation—and so on and so forth.

But in America, they are as yet neither the crucial questions nor the only alternatives. The human brain there is constantly excited by other issues. Every morning, reading your newspapers, you find that the restless, ingenious, audacious, energetic country has elaborated something new—an idea, an invention, an enterprise. Daily fresh fleets of balloons are launched in the American air. Doubtless a good many of them flop to earth immediately, but quite a fair number remain soaring. Anyhow, they are provocative and diverting; they serve to keep the mind fluid and to prevent

obsessions. From the point of view of emotional reactions, moreover, America has not been battered into almost complete supineness and indifference. The Europeans, living as close as they do to those terrific centres of disturbance—Italy, Germany, Russia, Spain—receive incomparably more frequent, direct and violent shocks than the Americans, and the uninterrupted repetition of horrors, persecutions, alarms, threats, sweeping brutal changes, unexpected dramatic moves, has resulted in a fatalism and a habit of resignation to the normally inconceivable that are very far from finding an echo in America. So far as it is possible to achieve a little poise and cheerfulness in our distracted world, that adjustment can be made in the New World. The prevailing temperament of the people there—the buoyancy, resiliency, energy—act on a wearied and unhopeful European as electrical massage acts on atrophied muscles. I do not say that the American scene can change the deep convictions of anybody whose reasoned philosophy is one of pessimism—as mine is, for instance—or inspire him with the certitude that human existence is ultimately justified and thus worth undergoing, but so sustained and overwhelming are the radiations of America that what happens to the fatigued foreigner is, at the least, a partial revival of vigour. Any disposition he may have towards resourcefulness, activity, curiosity, courage, will assuredly be consolidated. In a word, though there may be no re-birth, my experience is that America enormously facilitates renewal.

One element, nevertheless, among all the stimulating forces the country pours out so lavishly and irresistibly, appears to me to be lacking—and that is the element of spirituality. What I saw of the Churches, Baptist, Methodist, Episcopalian, persuaded me that they are entirely incapable of awakening it. In certain regions of America their hold is still tremendous, but they struck me as preponderantly social institutions, to which one belongs mainly (whether one admits it to oneself or not) through conventionalism, self-



interest, professional and business considerations, the necessity to stand well with the rest of the collectivity, or through a fierce hereditary superstitiousness, as in the Bible Belt of the South, for example. Besides, many of the ways they devise to get apathetic Christians to attend their services are so spectacular, so worldly, so nauseatingly vulgar—"pill-sugaring," the loathsome "attractions" are called—that you might just as well go to a low-class movie for edification as to a church. Between the eye-for-an-eye and the tooth-for-a-tooth Biblical God and the cheap, slangy, boisterously hail-fellow-well-met Deity, chock-full of the characteristics of the travelling salesman, into which the American Churches are turning their Creator, give me the grim Old Testament maniac every time. He, at least, possesses some dignity. The hysterical or melodramatic sects scattered all over the country—whose success is due, I suppose, to the profound need of escaping somehow from the iron repressions of original Protestantism—with their imbecile sensationalism, their sordid scandals, their lunatic language, cannot, of course, be considered as religion: they are merely the exploitation of half-wits by unscrupulous organizers.

In many communities, principally those of Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian and German origin, the older generations still uphold a code of ethics founded on the Decalogue which they were taught in their childhood and which is sanctioned authoritatively in their minds by tradition. But if you can discover any relation between this code of ethics, as it is usually practised, and spirituality, please show it to me, for I myself missed it. These generations, that paid lip-service to moral values, were the same generations that contributed most mightily to give to their country a universal reputation for crass materialism. It was in their heyday that America was known throughout the globe as a nation where legislatures, politicians, magistrates and police were bribed, bought and appallingly corrupt; where voting was utterly unprincipled; where public servants were venal; where business

methods were brigandly ; where intelligence, honest thinking, taste, were at the lowest possible ebb ; where money was spent with the utmost futility, selfish extravagance and ostentation ; where the gaining of power, wealth and luxury were the chief objectives of human endeavour and possessions the only criterion of a man's worth. Even when it is at its best, religion in America seems to me to have no holiness. It is in reality the religion of mankind plus a smattering of Hebraism, with a God who enjoins sympathy and helpfulness and rewards them by sending you success. I cannot remember more than two or three Americans who have been canonized by the Catholic Church. They are looked upon as freaks because the whole conception of saintliness is infinitely removed from the ordinary American temperament, which is too brimful of life to believe in the value of any sort of suffering. Frankly, I don't think Americans derive experience from suffering. They hate death, they dread pain, they want activity, and they strive for happiness, loudly, blindly, positively, as the greatest good. I don't criticize them in the least for this disposition ; their society has turned out to be far kindlier and more generous than any European one ; I just say that their religion is humanitarianism and not essentially Christian, and that it does not answer my own needs.

The younger generations have practically rejected the precepts which their fathers theoretically professed. For a variety of reasons—the extreme confusion of standards after the Great War, the (legitimate) criticism of the ungodly mess their elders had made of the world, economic independence (especially in the case of women), the widespread development of the study of compared religions, of anthropology, of biology and of sociology, the Freudian philosophy (which, though very dimly understood, floats about everywhere), the amazingly vague and inefficient guidance of parents and teachers in the home and the school, the execrable consequences of Prohibition, that led to lawlessness in all domains—youth in America is actually more “emancipated” than

anywhere else on earth. In general, it has thrown theology, dogma, cut-and-dried ethical rules of conduct, out of the window. For as much as I could make out, it has replaced orthodox religion by a very simple pragmatism. If an idea works out well and obtains tangibly successful results it is right; if it works out badly and achieves negative or disastrous results, it is wrong. The lower level of this pragmatism is the beneficence of notions as concerns the individual; the higher level is the beneficence of notions as concerns society at large. But on both levels the touchstone is the same, and the nature of the consequences determines the validity of the principle.

In these conditions, it is as useless to seek for a predominant undercurrent of spirituality in the behaviour and conversations of the young, who are vitalists and experimentalists, as it is to seek for it in the behaviour of the old, whose energies were exclusively devoted to the elaboration and accumulation of material things and whose fibre has ordinarily been sapped by their long scramble for dollars and the symbols of mundane prosperity. To all this, finally, must be added the fact that Americans are curiously, almost invincibly, unwilling to discuss abstractions, metaphysics and mysticism; so that, even when you come across someone who does possess that crowning manifestation of individuality, a spiritual life of his own—not that you come across him often, for the average citizen lacks character to a tragical degree: there are no people who become more readily the victims of the standards of others, who are more afraid of mass-opinion and who resist less steadfastly the suggestions of salesmen and advertisers!—it is hardly possible to extract from him an ordered exposition of his inmost thoughts and feelings. Intellectual stimulation and variety I encountered in America to an unprecedented extent; bolder, more vast-ranging minds than perhaps in any European country I know to-day; but an articulate interest in spiritual subjects is most uncommon—a contrast to the definite preoccupa-

tions of the English intelligentsia, for instance, whose younger members reveal a decided *penchant* for mysticism, and to the spread of religious sentiment among the middle classes and the student element in France.<sup>1</sup>

Philip had been following my monologue attentively. "I don't disagree, but what is this leading up to?" he said at last.

"Well, Philip, taking stock of all the knowledge and enjoyment and equilibrium that America was instrumental in procuring for me, I wondered why, from the spiritual angle, I made no progress there. Now I have explained to myself how it is that I didn't. I'm standing just where I was when I left Europe."

"Where's that?" asked Philip.

It was a singularly incautious question on the part of somebody who dislikes deflections. But I jumped at the opening it gave me. For a long time now I've been wishing to clear up my position in the matter, and this opportunity was too good to lose. Before Philip could check me, I poured out the dissertation he had brought so unguardedly upon himself. Here is the gist of it.

The trend of my speculations applies, as the speculations of all thinking persons who have no faith in revealed religions must apply, to the nature of the universe. Any omnipotent, omniscient, definite or conscious Supreme Being with a personal interest and intervention in the affairs of this world, I rule out. The question before me, therefore, is whether, with the help science affords me in the present stage of its investigations and with the quality and extent of the reasoning powers I myself possess—for I cannot go beyond them—it is possible for me to believe that the universe has a spiritual meaning, so that I should conform my conduct, more or less, to its values.

Two or three years ago an English writer, Gerald Heard,

<sup>1</sup> Among contemporary English writers of this category, I put at the head of the list, for sheer beauty of language and poignancy of feeling, Mr. Malcolm Muggeridge. See his *In a Valley of this Restless Mind*.

published a book called *The Third Morality*, which in its first half summed up excellently what mankind has thought of the universe since its beginnings. His enormous canvas can be boiled down, for my present purpose, to what the Occidental mind thought of the universe since Christendom was established in Europe—an evolution of which my own mentality is so representative that in stating, extremely broadly, of course, Heard's thesis I am stating the phases through which I myself passed. This thesis, that seems to me irrefutable, describes two distinctive stages of belief. The first stage Heard terms "anthropomorphism" (or, belief in a God in human form), faith in a personal God, sole creator of Heaven, Hell and the Earth, to whom we attributed omnipotence and omniscience in a scheme of things involving both our present lives and our hereafter. When we conceived God primitively, we added to this omnipotence and omniscience all the human instincts, passions, dispositions and failings; when we conceived him with a higher spirituality, all our best aspirations, imaginations and idealisms. In my own mental life, I swung from one to the other of these different aspects of the Deity. I was born and educated in a strict sect of the Protestant religion, and the picture it presented to me of the Lord God who had made me, who exacted obedience to a code He had Himself prescribed, who would judge me and determine my eternity, was purely that of the Jewish Jehovah of the Old Testament: an insanely incalculable, passionately unscrupulous, vindictive, jealous, irate, despotic Nosey Parker, chanting pæans of war, revelling in slaughter, approving treachery, who, though he had a finger in my and everybody else's business, hardly ever managed to settle anything decently, let alone justly. Still, there he was, to be prayed to and propitiated, for no one could get out from under his irrational, but universal and absolute yoke. I loathed him, but was thoroughly terrified of him as well.

At the age of eighteen, however, I became converted to

the Church of Rome, and the mystical teachings of Catholicism transformed my crude and barbaric Semitico-Protestant Heavenly Father into an indescribably nobler, more lovable, tender, merciful and understanding figure. This Deity, it is true, satisfied none of my intellectual questionings and criticisms—which were held to be “intellectual pride,” the only sin the Church never forgives. Directly inspired by Satan, they had to be instantly and forcibly repressed by acts of faith—but he was the boundlessly unfolding realization of my consuming vision of spiritual beauty, truth and goodness, of an eternal stability and of merciful, though infallible, justice. This was anthropomorphism still, but of an exceedingly elevated order, ascribing to God the most magnificent faculties of which the human soul is itself capable, and beyond these faculties, their supreme and everlasting consummation in perfection. Under monastic training and discipline especially (for shortly after my conversion I entered a convent and became a nun), I caught fleeting but entirely unforgettable glimpses of a comprehension of, and a union with, a Principle transcending my essence—a mere intuition, certainly, of the mystical life, but enough to give me a longing for those horizons, which I afterwards lost, that will accompany me to my grave. Nothing has replaced, nor will replace until I die, the radiance and the peace of those incommunicable intimations. At the end of a few years, however, I left the convent, my faith withered, and I fell into the second phase of which Heard writes.

This phase he terms “mechanomorphism” (or, belief in a machine-like universe)—another name for Positivism, Materialism, and Rationalism—and he brilliantly traces its inception to the discoveries of scientists in the fields of physics, biology and psychology. Latent in Galileo and Descartes, mechanomorphism was developed preponderantly by Newton, “who banished God from Nature,” by Darwin, “who banished him from life,” and by Freud, “who banished him from the last fastness, the soul.” It is the doctrine that

the universe is a non-rational machine which has no personal divine "minder or controller, which only man understands, and understands to mean nothing." It comprises no purpose, no goal, no immortality, and no *raison d'être*—only an automatic rhythm that science gradually makes more intelligible to man, so that to some extent he can increase his mastery over it and adapt it to his own needs and uses. In such a cosmology, there could be no sanctions at all in Nature for ethics and morality, since physical mechanism proved that the universe was blind, cruel and senseless, and biological mechanism proved that all evolution was due to the chance working of unconscious forces. There could only be room for intelligence or stupidity: man was intelligent when he employed all the means necessary to ensure his survival, whatever they might be; and he was stupid when he did not employ them and was submerged in the famous "struggle for life." When David Hume, the greatest of Rationalists, wrote that "there is no reason why I should prefer the pricking of my finger to the death of a thousand human beings," his argument was so logical as to be unanswerable. If any Rationalist practised morality, it was only because he had a hangover from anthropomorphical times—and even those lingering remnants of conscience were browbeaten by Freud, who taught that all the ideals and aspirations of man were perversions of the sexual energy alone. Throughout the world, during the nineteenth century, the mechanomorphic philosophy gained ground. With the rest of my generation I became steeped in it, to my indescribable intellectual unhappiness, for although my reason adhered to its concepts I was too impregnated by the Christian ethic to practise its conclusions remorselessly, and my behaviour in general was a series of the wildest inconsistencies, now actuated by my rationalistic brain, now by my moralistic conscience, making me unreliable and in the last analysis getting me nowhere at all.

Now for the second half of Heard's book. (Since it was

published Aldous Huxley has taken up and elaborated most of the same points of view in *Ends and Means*, a treatise which must be recognized, once you have recovered from the shock of finding that an author who for many years systematically presented life as a cesspool now presents it as the outpourings of the soul of an outrageously self-righteous Puritan Father, as an outstanding and coherent expression of the modern conception of the Cosmos. By the way, the sentences between quotes belong either to Heard or to Huxley; I remember them because they impressed me, but I was too impatient to take proper notes. Anyhow the inverted commas show the phrases are not mine.) His theory rests on the incontrovertible fact which contemporary science has established: that the universe consists not in "elements," "masses," or "bodies"—our past simple conjectures—but in a vast series of force-waves; that its basic reality is waves of radiation; and that all around us is electric energy. Whether the universe is "open" and infinite, or closes back on itself and is finite is a question that has not yet been settled, but practically that does not matter much: the point is that its range of power and its potentialities are inconceivably greater than we ever imagined. Now our perceptiveness is conditioned by an excessively limited, incomplete and faulty apparatus—our senses—so that out of the inconceivable powers and potentialities of the universe we can only pick up certain phenomena, exactly as a clumsy, rudimentary, inadequate wireless station can only pick up certain transmissions. What we pick up, nevertheless, we believe are the only realities, while in effect they are merely the realities the sense-equipment at our disposal permits us to discern. With a different sense-equipment, of wider scope and of finer vibrativeness, we should necessarily have another set of realities—and therefore of beliefs. In a word, we select "only a minute part of the wave-energy which is, at present, the scientific conception of objective reality, and we choose that that selected reality should be the solid world."



We are gravely mistaken. Our "solid world" is a construction made, on one hand, by a wave-energy, and on the other, by a particular organism, the living human body. It is a mixture of ourselves and of an unthinkably expanding force—and we cannot tell where the outer thing begins and our inner self ends. One living human body may be so endowed as to apprehend more of this unthinkably expanding force than another living human body, which accounts for certified facts such as telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, prevision, now admitted to be an extraordinary sensitiveness to forces that always existed but of which we cannot become aware unless the instrument that is the living organism is suitable. I do not know if, as time goes on, the instrument will be sharpened in such a fashion that every individual will respond to these forces, or whether the species generally must remain impervious to them (we can, of course, be helped out by the machines we make). In any case what we do know actually is, I repeat, that the final fundamental element is electricity, that its radiations are innumerable and incalculable, and that the "realities" of the universe, far from being fixed and absolute, far from being invariably there in their own right, are simply the perception, varying according to our capacity for receptiveness, of some of these vibrations and manifestations—at best an infinitesimal number.

Since science has discovered, by unassailable observations and experimentations, that the universe consists fundamentally in one single substance, it follows that all life must be pictured as a diversity of patterns of this single substance. The designs are varied beyond human computation, but basically they interflow and interlock and are ineluctably related. Each is a portion of a "consistent, interactive and super-personal evolution," a part of a comprehensive, all-embracing and integral Whole. The essential law of the universe is therefore an inexorable unity underlying the unknowable billions of different types and manifestations that life takes. If these premises are accepted—and I do not see

how it is intellectually possible to deny them—they must lead to the establishment of a principle. Whatever makes for reversion to the essential unity, whatever consolidates the fundamental integration, is in the inescapable order of the universe. Whatever makes for disruption and disintegration is against this same inescapable order. Every process of unification which results in the reinforcement of the pattern of inclusiveness of the universe is therefore right, and every process of separateness which results in the breaking-up of the pattern of inclusiveness of the universe, is therefore wrong. Is that clear?

But this pattern of inclusiveness is not only physical. If science shows that the world is a "diversity underlain by an identity of physical substance," it is quite as incontestable that mystical experience, throughout the ages, invariably shows the existence of a spiritual unity underlying the diversity of individual and separate consciousness. Transporting, as it cannot fail to be transported, the principle I have just defined from the material to the mental sphere, it is obvious that human dispositions and activities must also be classified according to the rôle they play in the consolidation or disruption of the universal spiritual unity. Just as, on the material plane, what pursues integration with the whole results in development, justness and harmony, and what pursues separateness results in arrested expansion, degradation and extinction (species, for instance, that have specialized, that is, achieved exclusiveness, either do not progress biologically or die out), so it is on the spiritual plane. There are qualities and acts that lead to unity, like understanding, co-operation, love, kindness, forgiveness, humility, detachment—so they are good. There are qualities and acts that lead to division, like hatred, greed, lust, envy, malice, pride, vengefulness, stupidity—so they are evil. Without being in itself consciously or awaredly moral or immoral, the universe, by its nature, establishes a system of spiritual values, the acceptance of which involves order and fruition, the

rejection of which involves disorder and disaster. There is no example in the long recorded history of mankind's mental experience that disproves this law.

So far, so good. Now comes another consideration. How does this law function practically in our everyday lives? The spiritual realities of the universe are ultimate realities. It is infallibly true that hate, vindictiveness, rapacity, are maleficent; it is infallibly true that charity, awareness, mildness, are beneficent. But the maleficence and the beneficence almost always produce their effects only in the long run. The law of the universe does not operate directly on behalf of the individual. It comprises neither immediate personal justice nor immediate personal compensation. Its rhythm unfolds without regard to the adjustment of any private case. Because the nature of the universe postulates spiritual unity, that does not mean that the human being who works for this unity will himself be safeguarded or rewarded, nor that the human being who outrages it will himself be checked or punished. Passions and actions will ulteriorly breed their appointed consequences, but the vessels of passions and the perpetrators of actions, good or evil, by no means necessarily bear these consequences themselves. Again I turn to the evidence of history. If the latter shows that social régimes founded on oppression, ferocity, arbitrariness, perish at last in corruption and catastrophe, that rulers and leaders who practise those qualities sow the seeds of such resentments as will one day shatter their theories and constructions, it very rarely happens that the originators of infamous régimes are called to account, or that the evil-doers meet with retribution while the victims of infamous systems and evildoers obtain redress and consolation. In every generation men have witnessed the triumph of iniquity in politics, war, law, business, sex—and, in the contemporary scene especially, victory going to the cruel, the violent and the ruthless. Who among us, too, has never seen, in the more commonplace walks of life, in family relationships,

knaves and bullies and ingrates profiting by their misdeeds, dying secure and complacent and honoured? What sentient creature, at one time or another in his existence, did not hear all the trumpets sound on this side for the wicked who had won? If I were writing my autobiography here *what* a story I could tell as a traveller, a political journalist, a social welfare worker, of the quality of the Conquerors of our world! I often wonder how it is that after having looked so long on such a spectacle, I still manage to retain a bit of sanity in my head.

All this being so, I greatly doubt—unless science hits upon more serious proofs of immortality than religions and occultism have hitherto fetched up and so assures us of direct and conscious compensation or retribution after death—whether faith in the long-term values of the universe can ever compel more than a handful of exceptionally high-minded, mystical and resolute people to exercise virtue. If the adamant belief in a waiting, immutable heaven or hell could not force us, in the ages of religious conviction, to adhere to good and refrain from evil, it seems to me hardly likely that we will struggle effectively against base impulses and interests through an intellectual desire to participate in an unintelligible and infinitely remote universal cohesion. I do not say it is not possible, but I say it is not probable. When we come face to face with life in the raw—and what with wars and dictatorships and concentration camps and liquidation of classes and depressions and economic ruin the majority of us now come face to face with life in the raw—I ask myself how we can be comforted and encouraged, in our anguish or defeat, by the thought that the universe rolls on its mighty way towards a consummation which discards us. For my part, my reaction would be to curse the universe for all it contains, and evolves, and is, and leave it—for as much as one can ever leave the damned bloody undying contraption—spitting out a last irreducible defiance. Of course, I am a very primitive person. But lots and lots of us are like me,

and very very few are like Gerald Heard or Mr. Aldous Huxley (new guise).

"Is this your promised dissertation on spirituality?" asked Philip.

I pondered. I don't appear, do I, to have made out a very strong case for spirituality. The fact is that though I think the modern conception of the spiritual nature of the universe is pretty valid, it does not cheer me up. There is a certain amount of satisfaction to be derived from the belief that the ultimate realities are realities of goodness, and that one is not quite an unspeakable fool to try and uphold them, but there ends, for me, the stimulus to do so. I do not care enough about a final order of which I shall never be conscious, to go further. My feeble and spasmodic efforts in the spiritual domain are not due to the "Third Morality." They are the consequence of my heredities and early education. I've already said that I am saturated with the Christian ethic: my tastes were cultivated in its direction, my conscience was trained in it, it is embedded in my very marrow. I have never been able to really uproot it, so finally I have given up the useless struggle and submitted to its tyranny. Often I judge it to be absurd, almost always it turns out to be detrimental to my interests, but I am more at ease with myself when I observe it than when I violate it, and sheer discomfort drives me, loudly protesting, to obey it off and on. That is all.

My intellect is fixed in entirely different ways. Whatever may be the supreme goal of the Cosmos, I am persuaded that in our span of life there is no absolute Truth to be discovered, and no real simplification to be attained; that there is no Utopia behind us or before us; that our souls are not immortal, and that our destiny, whether it be of doom or of felicity, is just a unique experience, important only to each of us, and thus essentially futile. Moreover, nothing—not God, not man, not any Sixth Dimension—can ever remit or expiate the evil and obscene past of the

human race: its superstitions, its ferocities, its injustices, its errors, its unfathomable, immeasurable, and utterly vain pain. Neither can anything obliterate or compensate the suffering of animals. I do not allude only to the ghastly torments man inflicts on the beasts; they might be avoided if he weren't such a sub-beast himself; but I wonder in what manner the ultimate spirituality of the universe can atone for the biological necessity which obliges species to rend and devour each other so that they can continue to live. Did you notice that almost all religions come a cropper on this question of the animals? Christian theology is as wretchedly weak on the subject as the "Third Morality." God forbid that I should deny the one and only merit man possesses: the enduring and indomitable passion that this small creature, witless in his mind, sickly in his body, blind in his spirit, maladjusted to the earth, oppressed by the demented social systems he invents, inexorably destined to disease, old age, and death, *has for struggling hard*. But when all's said and done, my considered opinion is that neither he, nor his struggle, nor the scheme of things that engendered him, is worth while. Existence is not only paradoxical, but irreconcilably so. "High heaven and earth ail from the prime foundation"; be it never so ultimately-good, none can put the durned concern meticulously straight; and it was only well with each of us in the days before we were born.

When I look the universe unflinchingly in the eye, I know that, whatever balance it may work out in an inconceivable future, it disgusts me. I go on at present because I enjoy a certain amount of health; a modest income of my own (though all the Governments of the countries where my money is invested unremittingly try to steal it from me); the ability to express my opinions in books, the success or failure of which does not much matter to me; a house where I am alone and comfortable; a garden that enchants me; the possibility, since I am not subjected to great stresses or temptations—I have no idea how I should act if I were—of

usually behaving fairly decently ; and a tremendous self-sufficiency. Just unmerited, inexplicable, colossal luck. If one of these factors were shattered, I should have no incentive to go on living (so, in effect, I am a Pragmatist, like most Americans). As it is, when I come to the point of death I shall heave, if I am capable of understanding what is happening to me, a sincere sigh of relief that the whole process is over. I have not liked it. What my narrow, tidy, moralistic, economical and logical little mind always wanted, was that the universe should be a perfectly functioning automatic slot-machine. You drop in your coin, sometimes a small one, sometimes a big one, and you get in exchange the small or big package the coin exactly deserves. If you slip in a counterfeit, the impeccably adjusted apparatus gives you back no package at all, and if you try to bust it, that, too, it discerns and retaliates by killing you quite dead with a quick sharp unerring aim. That automatic slot-machine was a nice, clean, orderly, rational proposition which I could have comprehended and praised.

But what, I ask you, did I find instead? A black, ugly, dirty, clamorous, frenziedly swirling mass of water, like a monstrous Mississippi on the rampage, rushing down into obscurity, whirling along the never-ending débris of the world. No use tossing in coins. It delivered no packages. My acquisitive and legalistic little soul, that was also conceited, irascible, and rather unafraid, indignant at such senselessness, brutality and waste, for a long time slapped at that roaring, raging torrent with all the wisps of straw which came to hand. I do believe it hoped the wisps of straw might somehow turn that wild and awful flood into the bright, slick, reasonable slot-machine so dear to its vision. But they didn't. So with the passing of the years it grew—not complacent, not cynical, not even contemptuous : but simply not interested. A mass of water is really a very stupid thing. So it burrowed in the earth a small hole of its own—there were no trees to climb in, the mad torrent had

uprooted them all—and sat on its backside at the very bottom of its tiny pit to wait for oblivion. And there it still sits to-day. But it is a dreadful come-down, after having longed to be Pure in Heart and See God, to resign oneself to squatting on one's bum and watching, unlit and unhelped and only waiting for oblivion, the self-betrayal of the Spirit, the arrogance of the Will, the impotence of the Intellect, the passion of the Flesh, and the corruption of Time, passing along in a chaotic procession to an uncomprehended sea.

. . . I was aware that my images were so literal as to be somewhat puerile, but after all I cannot help it if my brain does visualize life like that—we can't *all* be, I said to myself reassuringly, Aristotles or St. Thomas Aquinases—and I wistfully trusted that Philip would at least be touched by the austere hopelessness and stoical desolation of my position. Surely there was a little dignity, if nothing else, in my avowal that all was vanity and in my refusal, even though it were largely theoretical, to participate in vanity further. But I had over-estimated Philip's capacity for sympathy.

"I marvel," he said pungently, "that you should have thought it necessary to embark on a lengthy tirade on spirituality in order to reach such conclusions. At your age, you ought to know better than to describe life in terms of automatic slot-machines and rivers. Human life is the lesson, learnt, forgotten, re-learnt, lost, learnt again, and so on for ever, that man does not exist by bread alone. It is the only reality which can be ascertained, and so must be conformed to: what it leads to eventually is utterly beside the point."

"But what is it that is not bread?" I cried.

"Something Wholly Other," answered Philip.

And that is probably all one can say about it.



## CHAPTER VI

### OF SOME FUNDAMENTAL AMERICAN TRAITS

#### § 1

EVER since I began to think out this chapter, there has been an undercurrent almost of despair in my mind. *How*, I have asked myself again and again, *How* am I going to describe a people of one hundred and thirty millions, in a country of some three million square miles, divided into forty-eight States of most unequal size and population (New York State, for instance, has 13,000,000 inhabitants in 49,204 square miles, and Nevada has 91,000 inhabitants in 110,690 square miles) which must themselves be considered in regions that are emphatically different in their physical set-up, their racial stock, their customs, and their occupations? Europeans, who are nearly all of them ignoramuses with respect to America, have an impression that she is a closely united and homogeneous nation. She is, on the contrary, the most definitely, intensely and jealously sectional nation that exists. Think of the industrial North-east, embracing the New England States, the Middle Atlantic States and the Mid-Western States of Illinois, Michigan, Ohio and Indiana; of the staple-crop, cotton and tobacco-growing South, extending from the Atlantic to Texas, from the Mason-Dixon Line to the Gulf of Mexico; of the West, from the wheat-producing Dakotas to the Pacific—and these lumps compose only the broadest of classifications, for from the angle of geography, history and production they should be sub-divided again and again. Not one of these parts is America alone; no one area approximates the whole. Then think of the mentality. Even way back in 1787, when there

were merely thirteen States, populated almost completely by Anglo-Saxons, the feeling between them was so flamingly sectional that it was only by superhuman exertions on the part of Washington, Madison and Hamilton that the Union was established and a common Constitution accepted. Such hatred was injected into this sectionalism during the Civil War and its monstrous aftermath that to-day, seventy years later, the North and the South still essentially dislike each other and adhere to irreconcilable political parties and to separate cultures (even to distinctive accents). Think, too, of the profound dissimilarity between the South and the Middle West on one hand, and the East Europeans and their progeniture who settled in the North and East, on the other; and of the instinctive antipathy felt by the Protestant Americans for the Catholic and Jewish Americans. Frequently, surveying the country, it seemed to me that the only things Americans have in common are an exalted (but mistaken) belief that they are a Free Democracy; language (though often you doubt whether that is a common factor: try, for example, to get the mountaineers of Tennessee and Kentucky, who speak a kind of slow pidgin-Elizabethan English, to understand the New Yorkers, who rap out an odiously crazy and debased perversion of the magnificent English tongue); sports; the cinema; and comic strips. I know this sounds flippant, but there's more truth in it than you'd imagine.

Perhaps the most accurate statement one can make is that there is an "American temperament" which is very different from the "European temperament," so I had better get to grips with it and try to show its origins, which in their turn explain its prevalence. If I exclude the foreign white stock, some 38,500,000, and the Negroes, some 12,000,000: just below half the total population—in which European and African traits still predominate—there remain seventy-nine and a half million people who show deep-seated dispositions of a certain type. Besides, though America numbers thirty-eight and a half million foreign Whites, only thirteen and a

half are foreign-born; the rest, through education in the American schools and wide participation in national life and affairs, have been moulded, or at least greatly influenced, by the "American temperament." Many times I myself have had occasion to note how Italians, Hungarians, Irishmen born in America react, on visiting their *pays d'origine*, to the conditions and mentality of their compatriots. They do not really feel at home among them. If the imprint of American life on the first immigrant generations was perforce mainly limited to a modification of their national customs, the teaching of a few principles of hygiene and a development of the sense of independence, the second generation is on the road to assimilation, so that some American characteristics, at the very least, are already in the ascendant. A steady evolution, too, is taking place in the educated Negroes, despite the heavy social handicaps under which they labour and the racial trends they have to overcome in themselves.

But before I begin any sort of analysis of the prevailing American traits, as they appear to a European, I wish to denounce at the top of my voice a term applied to Americans by everybody (including themselves) which seems to me one of the most stupid and dangerous things ever said about them. They are invariably called "young." Now the politically independent American nation, as political nations go, is undoubtedly very recent, but the people from whom it sprang did not suddenly turn up on the soil of the New World, three hundred years ago, in the guise of cavemen. Three hundred years ago these people, English, French, Scotch, Dutch, Germans, Swedes, Spanish, all came from Europe. They were the Europe of the seventeenth century and represented the European culture, art, science, religion—all the knowledge—of that time. Are you going to tell me that Europe in the seventeenth century was "young"? Rubbish! Then why should the settlers who went to America from the old Continent, in whom the European heritage

was as full and strong as in those of their fellow-countrymen who remained behind, and who had Greece and Rome and Christianity and the Renaissance and the Reformation in their texture to the same extent as their neighbours, be entitled to be called "young" when nobody would dream of ascribing that quality to Europe herself? They had an identical past. Does one assume that the three centuries which have elapsed between the beginning of colonization and now, made the Americans "young"? Why? The colonists did not go barbarian all at once, on reaching America, and start again, mentally, from scratch, did they? The process of civilization went on in them just as it went on in the Europeans, with exactly the same elements to nourish it; and there can be no more "youth" about Americans than there is about the English, the French, and all the rest of the Old World peoples.

I have an idea that this preposterous label of "youth" was first affixed to America by European critics through disdain, or envy, or sheer intellectual laziness, for it enabled them to loftily dismiss the puzzle America represented or the lesson she gave. But the Americans also pounced upon the appellation and annexed it with highly pernicious results. They find, in the quality they most unjustifiably attribute to themselves, a superb excuse for refusing to examine and tackle shortcomings which they have no more business to possess to-day than any other European race. By unfaltering repetition they have persuaded themselves that their immaturity—which is not at all the same thing as youth—is normal, and that they have plenty of time to reach manhood. Indeed, they think they have every right not to have reached manhood yet. By such self-indulgence and mollicoddling they have stultified their growth. It is madness, for them as well as for us, to look upon America as a child. Her unripeness in some respects is real, but it is not that of a plastic adolescent; it is that of an exceptionally energetic, powerful, and self-willed creature which in part refused to think and

discipline itself sufficiently to attain fruition, and in part consciously adopted and pursued a preponderantly materialistic conception of life. It is not by camouflaging as "youth" her obduracy, slackness or irresponsibility, that she will ever prod herself into making the necessary effort to accomplish the spiritual work she has shunned so long. And because I ardently wish her well I set my face with sternness against the deliberate delusion which covers up so conveniently, in her own eyes, her greatest sin.

(Did you notice how like Philip I've got to talking?)

## § 2

From the outset of the European colonization of the Americas a very great difference was revealed between the temper of the Spanish, French and English settlers. The French and the Spanish were explorers and adventurers whose first expeditions were encouraged, and usually financed, by the kings of their respective countries. They were imperialists, dreaming of extending the possessions of their sovereigns. In spite of their intrepidity, the French failed to build an empire, partly because they were always absurdly few and poor, partly because their goal was trade or discovery (with the "voyageur" element), or the conversion of the Indian heathens (with the Jesuit missionary element). To farm, develop, and stay on the land was not their aim. The Spaniards, on the other hand, did build an empire in the South, for they were exceedingly numerous, many of them were very rich, and the Indian States they conquered with the utmost ruthlessness were themselves highly organized and wealthy. The invaders simply took over and exploited already magnificent resources, establishing an amalgamated civilization of which they were the undisputed and privileged ruling class. But neither the French nor the Spanish broke in any way with the aristocratic and

despotic governments of their homelands. They were not rebels, they were not even self-assertive, they continued to submit entirely to the authority, judgment and decrees of the autocrats to whom they recognized that they owed allegiance.

The disposition of the first English settlers—who had nothing to do with the earlier Elizabethan sea-dogs, actuated by wild and romantic energy, love of loot and the passionate desire to checkmate the king of Spain and annoy the Pope—was not at all the same. The larger portion of these settlers left England because at that time economic conditions were so bad that the population was becoming hopelessly poor; the political tyranny of the Stuarts had started; and a severe persecution of the Puritans was feared. The common man—the tradesman, the artisan, the labourer—of the middle and lower classes began to emigrate with the idea, not of conquering countries for the greater glory of his monarch, nor of saving the souls of the pagans, but of founding a stable and prosperous home for himself and his family, acquiring land, and being free to believe and speak as he chose. The lure was exclusively that of the independence, economic and political and religious, of the individual. (Later on the Puritans, who really were detestable folk and do not merit a tithe of the admiration still lavished on them so undiscerningly by Americans, set up in their communities a strangulating tyranny of their own. But that's by the way.)

From the point of view of character, one of the most important consequences of these initial intentions was rebelliousness in legal and social matters. Though the Government in England did not lay down colonial schemes and statutes as vast, strict, and unworkable as those of the French and Spanish, the settlers reacted in a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon fashion to the injunctions sent to them from overseas. Practical and sensible, as behoved the English nature, the emigrants considered that if they had faced the hardships of

an oceanic crossing, and endured the toil and perils of clearing land, fighting Indians, and creating a hearth, it was certainly not in order to be pestered, obstructed and damaged in their new life by the political regulations and the social distinctions of the old. They did not deny that Parliament had the right to make laws, but as time passed and conditions proved more and more definitely to be unlike conditions in the mother-country, what was questioned was the applicability of those laws to colonial existence. Whatever interfered with their chief interests and profits was obviously inapplicable. Once the settlers got into the habit of judging the validity of a law according to the way in which it served or disserved their own selves—that is, of discriminating—the next stage was inevitable: they got into the habit of deciding as individuals which laws they would obey, and which laws they would disregard, oppose, or even nullify. The observance of legality became, in their minds, not a matter of principle, but a matter of common sense, expediency, and private opinion. And there you have the germ of what was to grow into two basic and ineradicable American characteristics: illegality in action and pragmatism in philosophy.

Another essential development took place simultaneously. In the wilderness, felling trees and raising food, exposed to the same dangers on the part of nature and of the Indians, banded together in urgent communal tasks and in self-defence, eating, clothing and arming themselves in the same manner, the settlers found that the authority and advantages of birth, wealth and social position, which in England were the foundations of classes, just faded away. Whatever their origin may have been in England, in a colony people reverted to a very elementary status: that of a simple human being grappling with primordial difficulties. The frills and conventions were off, and your neighbour was only as good, but not better, than yourself. Once upon a time you may have belonged to a manor, or a counting-house, or a farm-

cottage, or a shop; it no longer mattered; your past privileges or handicaps could not determine your standing or your worth in circumstances where a man's sagacity, courage, energy and steadfastness were the things that counted practically. The values grew quite different, and the result was not merely an increase in the demand for self-government, but a decrease of class distinctions—the preliminary step towards the social (not economic) classlessness of America. The democratic spirit dawned naturally there over a century before it was delivered in France in the bloody and terror-stricken travail of the Revolution, and two centuries before it made any real headway in England, where it is still effectively impeded by the immense subservience of the common people to their aristocracy and governing groups, as well as by the invincible disease of snobbery that infests the entire Anglo-Saxon race.

I used to feel very irritated with the Americans I met in Europe, always swaggering and bragging about "democracy" in their country, when everybody knew what a blatant plutocracy they were, and how unjustly many minorities were treated under the Stars and Stripes. But on the whole, the Americans were right. Most of their institutions are anything but democratic in their workings, but the temper of the land is. What I am going to say has been frayed to rags, but it is true: whereas, in Europe, the democratic spirit is weighted and coloured with the old traditions of caste, and, to assert itself, reacts with defiance and even a tinge of revolutionarism which proves how much it is still on its guard against possible encroachments, in the New World it is a heritage. The American is born to it, not trained to it as we are, and while with us it is an education, with him it is an instinct. The filling-station attendant may admire the ten-thousand-dollar car that stops in front of his pump, but he will talk to its owner straightly, as one man to another, and never feel a tremor of inferiority. You will see any number of students in the American universities working



their way through their courses as waiters or errand boys, but not for a moment will the notion cross their mind that their innate quality is less excellent than that of the members of the swankiest of fraternities. Even in their rather wearisome slogans: "a cabin boy can become a President" and "a poor man a millionaire," there is more than the assumption that success and high office are attainable by everybody because of the multiplicity of opportunities and the absence of social taboos; there is the conviction that their intrinsic fibre is such that it can win through. No native American will ever dream of repeating, except in jest, the sickeningly humble English phrases, "our betters," "the likes of us," "the station to which God has called us." Considered from that angle, their democratic spirit is certainly the most spontaneous and genuine that exists—and from it, too, derives that genius for getting down to essentials by short cuts, that directness of speech, that informality of manners and facility of contact which are so inestimably refreshing a change from the involved ceremonial and obliqueness of approach of political, commercial, and social intercourse in our over-clogged Europe. The American is so sure of his calibre and rights as a free human being that instantly you also know where you stand.

But there is a reverse side to this admirable medal, and if I insisted on the origin of the real democratic independence of Americans, it is because another of their major traits must be traced to the same source: their lawlessness. For modern America is the most lawless advanced country under the sun, moon, and all the constellations.

I am not speaking here of criminals, but of the ordinary American. He is not in the least a pathological creature, but he is a creature inheriting, as I have said, a primary Anglo-Saxon disposition to practicalness and pragmatism; a habit unbrokenly practised by his colonial ancestors of picking and selecting, in the whole body of laws, those that suited them; and so imperative an urge towards liberty that

at last it materialized in the making of a nation. The very long epoch of frontier life emphasized all these points. During it the pioneers, enormously remote from the courts and the authority of established communities, legislated for themselves, locally, in an excessively rough-and-ready fashion, and enforced their high-handed methods on the spot. Indeed, to constrain them to practise its own methods the Central Government, coming in very slowly behind them, had as often as not to resort to the military or to special police. This period has only just closed; up to some forty years ago, America always had a Frontier—why, Arizona only entered the Union in 1912!—and its effects still endure. Neither the nature of the American, nor the social outlook transmitted to him, nor his history, are of a kind to induce in him *à priori* a respect for ordinances. As a citizen, he is far from being broken in to that strict conception of, and regard for, legality *qua* legality which appears normal to the civilized European, for though we have no compunctions in declaring that the law is a h'ass, none of its asinine antics takes away from the fact that it is the law and must be put up with until it is constitutionally changed. The best American citizen, when he esteems that his lawmakers are wrong or foolish, conducts himself practically like a malefactor, for he comes exceedingly quickly to the end of reflections and words and passes to action—and violent action at that, for violence is in his bones. (He's invariably astonished when you tell him so; you won't believe me, but I assure you he's somehow managed to persuade himself that he's *mild*! Yet an imminent violence is one of the first things you sniff in the American air.)

Personally, I never got over my amazement at the way in which, for example, my acquaintances, otherwise irreproachably trustworthy, mocked at the rules on speeding and parking. They thought the rules were stupid or inopportune, therefore they violated them without hesitation. If they got caught, do you imagine they ever appeared in court and

paid their legitimate fine? Not on your life! They telephoned to a politician they knew—every soul in America is on familiar terms with a politician—or to one of those immeasurably dishonest but clever lawyers, “shysters,” who are an institution in the United States, and pulled strings, or swore falsely, and escaped. Their civic conscience remained perfectly unperturbed. The law went against their interests or necessities, and so called for cheating. In their own eyes, they would have been boobs if they had not circumvented it, thwarted the judges, and displayed openly their marked contempt for the executive. What you cannot make them understand is that it is precisely this mentality that paves the way for crime. Think of what happened during Prohibition, an era of national disobedience that could scarcely have been surpassed had the country been in revolution. The inconceivable thing was not that gangs flouted the decrees—you get smugglers and felons in every land—but that the whole population encouraged and participated in the flouting. What this cost America, and continues to cost her, in degraded morale, cannot be calculated: one of the results, and not the least sinister, of her demented intractableness was that as soon as the liquor gangs went out, the racketeers came in—and at that, too, the people connive. Consider the significance of the following facts: there are armed guards on all the floors of the big banks, and when it is necessary to carry valuable negotiable securities or cash from one street of a great city to another, the transfer must be performed in an armoured car! Look at the spurts of mob-rule that occur so frequently in the land—complicated by racial, religious or political prejudice, they become the bestial lynchings of the South or the outrages of the Ku Klux Klan, Vigilantes and what not. But in their essence they are only an expression of the inveterate scorn the people have for legal decisions that do not suit them, and of their instinct to sweep authority away and do what they themselves think fit.

It seems to me that chronic insubordination is a far graver menace to the moral health of a nation than crime proper. Outbreaks of crime, even of the desperate and brutal sort that is rampant in the United States, may be due to sets of temporary conditions: a loose administration, a corrupt police, venal politicians, complaisant judges, an influx of irresponsible or destitute foreigners. (This last occurrence took place in France after the War, and crime went up by leaps and bounds.) A collectivity may be victimized by them for some time, but if it is sound at bottom it will pull itself together and master them, so in themselves they are not a proof of persistent decay. What is infinitely more significant is the attitude of the general public towards them. In America that attitude is terrifyingly supine, precisely because it has its roots in an inherent national lawlessness. It is often argued that the lack of reaction is caused by the fact that the public has nearly ceased to expect that criminals will be caught and punished, owing to the complicity of the police and the political bosses, but that is not a satisfying answer. A people which respects the law would never tolerate such corruption on the part of its servants. The Americans have more than sufficient intelligence, energy, and technical equipment speedily to clean up their politics, their police, their system of criminal justice, and to exterminate their thugs and crime combines if they felt the resolute wish to do so. But being lawless themselves, themselves breaking daily one minor law or another, they are not shocked into effective protest by the lawlessness of others, and have tacitly acquiesced in vice as an institution to an extent unparalleled in modern civilized countries. Besides a practically universal indifference to the putridity of so many of their authorities, they display a disposition to admire, and even, incredibly, to sympathize with, the "smartness" of daring and successful malefactors. It is almost as if the citizens obscurely sensed a link between their own temperament and that of the out-and-out desperadoes whose spec-

tacular exploits fill the newspapers. It is idiotic to think that America is helpless against them: if a millionth part of the ingenuity and tenacity that infuse business, infused the repression of crime, she would get rid of her pests, crooked politicians, bribed policemen, and gangsters, to-morrow. But there—she cares about business and does not care about law. So: *que voulez-vous*? Suddenly I have grown immensely tired of all this well-meaning but exhausting and quite useless nagging of America. Since she WANTS to let a loathsome lupus eat up her face, who am I to prevent her?

### § 3

The whole of this section is due to Philip's officiousness. No sooner had I washed my hands of America than he interfered and said it was my Duty to continue nagging her. My only *raison d'être*, he said, as I was incapable of creative work, was nagging in a righteous cause. Besides, he added, America is always ladling out unsolicited advice to the entire globe, so why shouldn't she have a taste of her own medicine for a change? I have also grown immensely tired of wrestling with Philip. Fighting in the lawcourts, admonishing the lazy, disputatious, unconscientious Front Populaire workmen on my estate, and screaming from morning to night at my lively and undisciplined French servants leaves me only a tiny scrap of intellectual energy for my book, and Philip just sucks that scrap out of me by objecting to all I say. He is more pertinacious than I am. If he declares that I must go on nagging America, it is easier to nag America once more and have done with it, than to wear myself out resisting him. So here goes.

Crime is the biggest business in the United States. In Washington I was officially told that it costs the country over fifteen billion dollars a year—more than three billion pounds sterling. (I thought it was very courageous of the authorities

to show such frankness.) Its ramifications are as widespread, thorough and ruthless as those of Fascistic and Communistic propaganda—which is saying a mouthful. Every living soul in the land pays tribute to it in one form or another. The peculiar organization it has elaborated began during Prohibition with rum-running, bootlegging, the illicit manufacturing of alcohol, and rapidly turned into the activities of gangs and “beer barons,” into the era of machine-guns bought and used under the impotent nose of the Federal Government, into raids, hold-ups and slaughter in the streets. After that came the age, in which America actually finds herself, of the super-racketeers and crime combines. They have a quite new and distinctive hall-mark—perfect method and a consistent, calculating, passionless corruption. They are not moved by madness or rage, but by an icy intelligence exclusively concentrated on gain. Human feeling, even depraved, even rotted, does not enter into their picture. They do not outrage it: they are without it. They are purely wolves.

The easiest way to make you understand how they proceed is to compare their evolution to that of an eminently successful merchant. The merchant starts by catering to a prosperous community, and thrives so much that he soon opens several branch stores, establishing a careful friendship, as is the American custom, with his town's leading citizens, the banker, the politician, the judge, the police captain, whom he helps and who help him. He becomes so influential that a sectional chain-store organization finds it worth its while to buy his group of local stores and to pay him as a director of local policy, in which he is particularly well-versed. If an independent store tries to butt in, it is amalgamated, or bought out, or completely ruined through cut-throat competition. The sectional chain-store organization is in its turn absorbed by a national chain-store organization, in which the merchant continues to play, as he holds a great deal of stock, a most important rôle. Since he is an inventive

and forceful fellow—evidently he is, otherwise he could not have reached such heights—he thinks out further ways of expansion, and eventually merges his business with another national business producing goods resembling his own but in a wider and more diversified field, the while he keeps on manufacturing and selling his particular brands. Thus he raises himself to be a leader in a nationally operating institution, and yet controls and animates huge sectional offices. Replace the words “merchant” and “store” by those of “racketeer” and “racket,” and you have a rudimentary notion of how the great racketeers, who are the heads of the business, acquire wealth and power, and of how the crime combines, that are the business itself, begin, develop, and obtain a grip over the whole country.

It is impossible to make a full exposé of racketeering in a few pages but if you are interested in the matter, read *Crime Incorporated*, by Martin Mooney (Whittlesey House, publishers), a star reporter who has provided me with many of my facts. I’ve read several books on the subject, but his is the most lucid and dynamic, and the very first to disclose publicly the basic principles of the business. The large-scale crime combines can be likened to monstrous depraved Chambers of Commerce, which protect the rackets exactly as a legitimate Chamber of Commerce protects lawful trades. They are composed of board directors who hold sessions and plan programmes; of major executives, who carry out the comprehensive orders; of exceedingly clever and highly remunerated shyster lawyers who are attached to the board as consultants. These governing bodies exercise control over the rackets through committees answerable to them. The committees are classified according to their function: there are “news-projects” committees that are constantly on the look-out for fresh rackets, and that investigate possibilities; “secret-service” committees, numbering trained detectives, that collect information about every person who may be of aid or of danger to the crime combine—information used at

the appropriate time; "contact" committees of go-betweens, frequently men whose services are enrolled by means of blackmail; and "lobby" committees, that watch or manipulate those legislators whose speciality is passing laws on crime. Nothing is left to chance, advantages are exploited, weak points are reinforced, discipline is imposed, profits are divided, and protection is assured to all.

But what, you might ask me, are the tangible objects the rackets handle in order to squeeze fifteen billion dollars out of the public every year? I suppose only an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation could enumerate them all, they are so multitudinous; but personally those I heard most about when I was in America were prostitution, drugs, abortion, "pinball" games, "numbers" games, race-tracks, garages, night-clubs, diamonds, taxi-cabs, gambling of every variety, guns, milk, artichokes, fake unions, laundering. To give you an idea of how the crime combines work I'll describe briefly the artichoke racket, which was recently investigated, though I think the investigation resulted in nothing. Artichokes happen to come from only two sections of the country, California and Florida, and some New York Italians made a "corner" in them after the War, buying control over most of the cars that contained them and that arrived in the city. The wholesalers found they could only buy the produce the public wanted from the Artichoke King, at his own price—and when they paid that price, they received the franchise of a specific district. The retailers in that district were naturally forced to buy the artichokes on the wholesaler's terms, the public footing the bill for the two "pay-offs." But some of the cars still had independent owners. If they, too, handed a pay-off to the Artichoke King, the wholesalers were allowed by the latter to buy the vegetables from them—the public shouldering that pay-off again. If—making the mistake of believing that America was a free country and that they could sell their artichokes to whom they pleased and at a lower price if they chose—they didn't



agree, they discovered that their cars were not unloaded in time, and so their produce decayed; or that their crates were sprayed with kerosene; or that their delivery men were ambushed and the goods they carried scattered in the streets; or that the grocer who bought direct from them (also trying to be a free citizen) got his windows shattered or was otherwise intimidated. So very rapidly the recalcitrants lost their innocent desire to act as free American citizens, and the artichoke racket blithely pursued its untrammelled course.

A European reader will say at once: "But why didn't the independent sellers appeal to the police?" Well, you can still do that in Europe, despite Communism and Fascism, but apparently you can't in the United States. All the police seems able to do for you there is to pat you on the back and tell you as your buddy that it's just too bad but maybe you had better take it and like it. And the local politician gives you the same disinterested advice. And the district-leader too. And the city official *idem*. And so on. The crime combines are very wise in their generation and know how to spend money with incomparable lavishness when and where it is necessary. In New York, one day, I was taken to see a laundry where, during the night, all the linen belonging to customers had been slashed or stained. A short time before that, the owner's truck had been stopped in a deserted street, the driver beaten up, and the bundles of clothes burnt with acids. It appeared, on inquiry, that the laundryman had been benighted enough to refuse to pay toll to the laundry racket, but now, poor devil, he saw the light and assured us that the next time a stalwart young man called to inform him that he really did need "protection," he'd be exactly of that stalwart young man's opinion. The police, obviously, couldn't be expected to put a guard round his shop every evening or to accompany his truck on its rounds. And there you were.

I thought of the fashion in which a French *patronne* of

my small city—*teinturière* or *épicière* or *crémère* or *bouchère* or *gérante de café*—would receive a young man who suggested to her that some of her beloved sous should be dropped into his pocket, and I chuckled. The tradespeople of the town would lynch that young man singlehanded before the gendarmes even got a chance to nab him. The rugged individualism of the Americans has indeed suffered a strange eclipse, for it is rather paradoxical, when you come to ponder it, that the descendants of a people who made a Revolution rather than pay taxes to England should spend fifteen billion dollars a year to keep their criminals in free, happy and luxurious idleness. But, after all, *à chacun son goût*. What on earth can one say? If you haven't the guts to kick out your verminous police, politicians, officials and racketeers, then the only alternative is to support them. Spunk-transmissions haven't been invented yet, or I'd get the French *commerçantes* of my little town to lend some of their spirit to America.

A counter-current to the crime combines has recently been set up by the Federal Department of Justice (Federal, not State or municipal authorities), whose Bureau of Investigation is turning out, albeit very belatedly, some of the most superbly trained agents in the world, the G-Men under Edgar Hoover. During my stay in New York a magnificent drive was also started by an heroic District Attorney, Thomas Dewey, who smashed one of the most malignant, powerful and complex rackets in the city, that of commercialized sex, and sent the ringleaders to life-long prison. Then he cracked down on a restaurant racket, in which Labour unions were involved. During the trials such evil was revealed that one reverted to the unfathomable bewilderment of a child: how-ever could it be, one wondered, that the heavens didn't open and somebody or something lay the metropolis low? The ancient Jehovah, though I rail at him, had his merits; he could always be relied on to do some drastic pulverizing when things had reached the limit; but now, evidently, no

god has *foutre* enough to rain fire and brimstone on a writhing vice-heap like New York.

They were peculiarly dangerous, too, these trials. . . . The prosecution, to safeguard its witnesses against the revenge of the crime combine, was obliged to conceal them, in full court, behind a contraption of closed shutters so as to avoid recognition. Such precautions are not at all unusual. Mr. Mooney relates the story of a pay-off man who decided to testify against his boss. He was the Federal Government's prize witness, and to protect him two G-Men ate, slept, lived with him day and night. When the trial was delayed through the tricks of the shyster lawyers on the defence side, the informer was taken on a round-the-world cruise by the Federal agents, that being the only safe place they could devise for him—though America, as you know, is pretty big. When the trial did come on, the problem was how to get the witness into the court-room to testify, for the crime combine had planted a machine-gun opposite the entrance to the court building, ready to mow down the squealer the instant he arrived. I shall have to tell you how the G-Men smuggled him in, as the whole affair is too fantastic for a normal mind to grasp unaided. A truck drove up to the court-house with three painter chaps in it, who had been assigned to the job of repairing the ceiling of the Abode of Justice—and repair it they did, perched high up on a scaffold and screened by a canvas covering. At a crucial moment during the trial, the witness's name was called in court, and down a rope ladder he dropped from the ceiling. He was one of the three workmen who had been painting away. As to what one should think of the Government of a mighty Democracy, that could not prevent a machine-gun from being illicitly planted opposite a court-house, and was compelled to resort to quasi-prestidigitation to produce its own witness before the judges of the land, I'll leave you, if you are an Englishman, a Frenchman, a Dutchman, a Swiss, a Norwegian—anything but an American, for he is accustomed to such insanities—to say.

But even the redoubtable Department of Justice will not achieve much unless the American people rouse themselves to back it, reforming at the same time that lawlessness and connivance at lawlessness which they practise as individuals and which makes the civilized future of their country precarious in the extreme.

"And now go to the devil," I said to Philip, heartily. "You and America between you have plunged me in a bath of stinking mud."

It stuck so, I had to read a chapter of *L'Imitation de Jésus Christ*, to feel cleaner.

#### § 4

In this enumeration of national traits it is obvious that I can be guided only by the force of my personal impressions. After lawlessness, what struck me most was the gregariousness of the Americans. From it radiate so many other qualities, that I shall make it the nucleus of my second group of characteristics.

Sociability, kindness, helpfulness, hospitality—how they stagger a person who comes from the querulous, suspicious, close-fisted, malevolent Old World! There are reasons for our being all these things, of course, but I am not analysing Europe here, so I shall not try to exculpate us. The general warm-heartedness and good-will of the people were such a new, such a consoling experience that I find nothing in my long career as a traveller to equal it. Don't you believe anybody who tells you that the Americans, as a nation, are snobs. Some cliques in the big towns are snobbish, but they are so few and numerically so feeble that they literally do not count except *vis-à-vis* themselves—New York's vulgar, ostentatious and foolish "Four Hundred," supposedly representing Society with a capital S, is fortunately a thing of the past—and if Americans in Europe become snobs, it is thanks to

friends will run in to help you with the cooking and afterwards wash up. Fancy a French *bougeoise* lifting a finger to prepare your meal or to put your kitchen in order! The habit of hospitality was the result of enormous distances and the curiosity for news, and trained the Americans in the art of giving: they give almost as naturally as they breathe, not only to public institutions but to each other. They are always thinking of little gifts, always sending off little presents. They have a distinct idiosyncrasy, so distinct, in fact, that I am inclined to believe they are the only people who possess it. They like to like and be liked—barring the mountainous regions, however, for in West Virginia, in Tennessee and Kentucky, the temper resembles the personal, primitive, clannish disposition of the Corsicans and Caucasians. In that respect they form a great contrast to the English, who cannot, for the life of them, show liking, and are horribly clumsy and embarrassed when liking for them is shown, and to the French, who neither like to like nor give a damn whether others like them or not. (True, the French and Spanish are the only authentic individualists in the world.)

So habit and temperament combine to make social relations—outside business and mundane rivalries that are as fierce as anywhere else—the pleasantest I know, lavish, cordial, informal, extremely neighbourly, with such an inborn sense of responsibility surviving in the hosts that they go to unbelievable pains to make their guests happy. I always felt, in American houses, that the guests were *the* important thing, a delightful change from relations in France, which are too precise and conventional, too much like accounts—all the invitations must be totted up accurately and punctiliously returned—and in England, where people think it smart to be negligent and casual to the point of rudeness. You never know, in those countries, whether you will be entertained at a party: generally you aren't; but in America you may be certain that the good manners and carefulness

of your hosts will lead them to choose and group round you exactly the persons you can enjoy. I eagerly seize the opportunity this passage gives me to thank with all my heart the countless Americans of every description, in whose homes I invariably received the most unstinted and unaffected welcome, the most unfailing consideration, it has been my lot to experience. They almost persuaded me it meant something to them to know me—which is the highest homage one human being can render another.

I found, nevertheless, in this very sociability, a discomfort and a danger. The discomfort was subjective: the lack of privacy. To me, who cannot feel really alone unless I have locked myself up in a room, the absence in American houses not only of closed doors, but of doors themselves; the perpetual companionship; the constant dropping-in of friends; the infinitude of drives and picnics taken in common; the ceaseless babbling of the radio, seemed sometimes unbearable. The complete dependence, for relaxation, of everybody on somebody or on something, is alarming. The number of associations for men, women, youngsters; the business, social, country and sports clubs—Rotarians, Masons, Lions, Kiwanis, Mechanics, Red Men, Elks, thousands more—are like the grains of sand on the shores of an ocean. I did not like the implications. If ever Fascism or Communism come to America, they will find the ground all prepared for their chief instrument of influence, the awful habit of group-living. No one can stand being solitary. No one can even stand being private or allowing anyone else to be private: try to put up a garden wall or hedge round your house, instead of rubbing shoulders with your neighbour's house, and see the effect such "high-hattism" will produce on the community! If you are a professional man, obliged to bid for a certain amount of popularity, you are done for. Not only does living alone run counter to the American's nature, but it has come to signify, instead of a spirit of sane and dignified independence, unsuccess. So it is avoided like fire and sociability

tends to degenerate into the negation of the right to be a separate entity. Continually it seemed to me that, through their gregariousness, Americans, all unsuspectingly, are renouncing more and more the liberty which induces individual experiment in living. In spite of their professed antipathy for regimentation, one of its most insidious forms, uniformity, is triumphant in their country.

But there's more, and worse. The exaggeration of sociability has resulted in making the average American an uninteresting nonentity. This is the very last thing we imagine is true of him: we must go to America to discover it. In Europe we see the American usually singly, displaying traits very different from ours. We ascribe them to a courageously distinctive individuality, and say, generally with some respect, for we admire a man who is himself: "*Comme ces gens ont de la personnalité!*" Personality? There is not enough personality in the average American to fill a thimble. You cross over to America and what you realize immediately is that the traits you thought, in Europe, were a proof of sturdy self-assertion are anything but distinctive. They are inass-traits, reproduced in everybody and by everybody with a cowardly imitateness, and they are so immutable that after you've spent a few months in the United States, you sorrowfully decide that the average Americans are entirely deficient in character and that when you've met a score of them you've met them all. In the whole of my experience of the land I never perceived a trace of eccentricity—and what is eccentricity but the fearless expression of one's own spirit? The Americans are not eccentric, first because they have no social fearlessness, and next because they have scarcely any spirit of their own to express.

Now let's see why they've gone and turned themselves into uninteresting nonentities and why, when they affirm they are "individualists," and rugged in the bargain, as they persist in doing, one is tempted to half laugh, half weep, at their ignorance of the meaning of words. To begin with,

who set up the social pattern of America? Exclusively the middle and lower classes that came over from Europe. Some European aristocrats squeezed in, of course, but they were only a handful, and mostly tumbledown specimens at that. It is a pity more blue blood did not emigrate, for though the aristocracy has an abundant supply of the specific qualities of the bandit and the villain, it possesses a genuine disdain of what others think and insists upon being itself. But it did not mould America and exerted no influence on manners and customs. The people who did mould her and established manners and customs were the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie has many admirable virtues—I am of it myself and thoroughly sympathize with it—but socially it is timid, sheep-like and quite cravenly afraid of what the neighbours will say. The overwhelming passion of the true bourgeois is not to affront public opinion; to be well-tucked-in among the rest of the herd; on no account to be differentiated from it, and to keep to the values evolved by his fellows, who being middle-class themselves, lack dash, trenchancy and vividness just as he does. In brief, the bourgeois strives with might and main to be, and to have everything, exactly like everybody else. The prevalent social design in America is therefore doubly drab: because the gregariousness of the people tends to make them flocks, with all the characteristics of flocks, monotony, inability to think on their own, excessive suggestibility, a propensity to allow themselves to be swamped; and also because the standards originate in the middle class, and the middle class, although it is honest, laborious, sensible of its civic duties and clean-living in its huge majority, is notoriously devoid of originality, independence and colour. When the Business-Man's Civilization came along and imposed, on drabness, conformity, the chance to blossom into individualism was lost. I may be unduly pessimistic, but my notion is that it's lost for good and all. Not only in America; for with Communism, Fascism and the mass-mentality Democracy has developed,



hounding it everywhere, I do not see in what corner of the earth it can flourish again.

### § 5

If love of money means that you understand its value for security, that you use it with caution or economize or hoard it, and that it leads you to lose the great virtues of warm-heartedness and generosity, then listen to this: Americans execrate money. Yet their civilization to-day is the Business-Man's Civilization, and springs from the spirit of Profit. This is a complicated process to explain, and I do not know whether I shall succeed in making it clear, even to myself.

Since the colonists sailed from the Old to the New World predominantly in order to ameliorate their economic conditions, we can say fairly enough that the spirit of Profit presided over the birth of Anglo-Saxon America. I don't mean this as a reproach. The desire for self-betterment was perfectly legitimate, especially as the implication was that the hoped-for profit could not be won by privilege or favouritism but by the quality and efforts of the colonist himself. Besides, all the colonial settlements ever founded have at their base this same wish for greater prosperity. But the first American settlers laboured under a double disadvantage. In many instances—particularly where the Greek civilization was concerned—colonists brought with them a culture to which they adhered, and which mitigated to some extent the sharpness of the profit-motive. In America it proved difficult to maintain the original European culture. The new country was so formidably huge and wild and empty that the immigrants soon slipped into a period of intellectual and artistic regression. (Such a regression was not completely inexcusable. It was far more excusable, for example, than the brutality and treachery with which the majority of the

settlers treated the Indians. The Indian tribes were by no means all fierce and irreducibly antagonistic, but with the exception of the Quakers, almost all the settlers looked upon them as vermin to be exterminated, and they hardly ever kept faith with them. It is extraordinary how American history books gloss over the crimes of the settlers *vis-à-vis* the Indians and harp only on the savagery of the natives towards the colonists, though it was the behaviour of the latter which, again and again, provoked the cruellest reprisals).

The first colonists and their families found themselves without food and shelter. They were not helped by organized conditions and machines. They had to stake out a clearing with their own hands, chop trees, build houses, plant corn and vegetables, hunt animals, spin cloth, make their implements. When you are struggling daily for bare existence, something is bound to go by the board. As the settlers could not escape from the incessant toil of conquering the wilderness, and as their energy, however heroic, was limited, what went by the board were the finer and more leisured things of life. There was no time for conversation, for reading, for writing books, for cultivating the arts—there was scarcely time for manners. They were obliged to concentrate on physical things, and nothing was practised that was not useful, that did not result in some positive gain. From the beginning, therefore, the emphasis was placed on material standards and achievements, and it continued to be so placed because of the odious turn of mind of the Puritans, who frowned upon thought and everything æsthetic as frivolous trimmings and turned mere hard work and thrift into the cardinal virtues, mixing them up with spiritual merit—so that tangible prosperity came to be inseparable from righteousness and signified the public approval of the Lord. Personally I believe that the Puritans, even more than circumstances, were responsible not only for prolonging the era of diminished culture in America (which lasted for a century or so), but for definitely stamping on the budding American

spirit a materialistic imprint that was never to be obliterated.

As the decades rolled on, and the great natural obstacles of the first epoch of colonization were stubbornly overcome, there developed two distinct currents of culture: in the New England States—notably in Boston—intensely though narrowly and pedantically preoccupied with intellectual matters, and in the Southern States, where the big landowners formed a society of men with cultivated tastes, a philosophical outlook and qualities of leadership. But in spite of those currents, the growing civilization of America retained a preponderantly commercial note. The North-east, faced by the evidence that farming could yield only small and unprofitable returns owing to the nature of the soil and the difficulty of obtaining labour, turned to shipping, overseas trade, the importation of black slaves, and industrialization. The immense agricultural area of the South was based on the raising and exportation of tobacco and cotton and on the economics of slavery. The principal interests of the well-to-do never ceased to be, on a much larger scale, what the interests of the earlier settlers had been: material—and the spirit of Profit persisted as the main inspirer of all activities. Moreover, it acquired a fresh impetus and driving force every time the frontier expanded.

Now the frontier began to expand genuinely and tremendously towards the middle of the eighteenth century. By that time the seaboard communities were established under a system where the rich and influential had grabbed the best chances and monopolized the principal resources, with the result that although collectivities as a whole were advancing in wealth, the poorer people benefited less and less and felt more and more bitterly that they were being cheated of the freedom and opportunities America had stood for in their minds. This mass of population, all unfortunate, miserable, resentful and exploited by speculators, claimed that it was “against the law of God and nature that so much earth

should be idle while so many Christians wanted it to labour on and to raise bread," and moved into the wilderness, where, if there was danger, there was at least no organized land-injustice. Farther and farther beyond the limits of the settled districts, a push started towards the practically unlimited West. Already very perceptible before the War of Independence, despite the attempts of the British Government to prevent it, it became an irresistible and gigantic exodus after the peace. In 1800, a million Americans were living west of the enormous watershed of the Appalachians; in 1820, two and a half millions; in 1830, three and a half millions.

The land opened before them as they spread, a land of surpassing, unimaginable richness. There were incalculable expanses of free soil; prodigious forests; fabulous amounts of minerals. Gold was discovered. It seemed as if affluence was to be reached by every man, that fortunes were to be had for the seizing. These hopes, of course, often fell very short of attainment, and the hardships, the political and economic complications encountered in the West were legion—but nevertheless it appeared overflowing with colossal possibilities and promises, it was an empire of riches such as men hitherto had not seen. The Americans rushed into it to capture them and not in the least to reinstate the initial American Dream. Essentially the aim of the frontier period was the absorbed and exclusive pursuit of the material basis, the material prizes of life. I do not deny that certain attributes were developed or intensified in this frenzied race—audacity, courage, self-reliance, optimism—but I am resolute in my opinion, contrary to the prevalent belief of the Americans, that the frontier age was, incomparably more than even the ugly rapacious mercantilism of the North-east and the blind greedy folly of the agricultural super-exploitation of the South, the chief instrument of America's present structure. The older cultures of the seaboard, which had many faults but contained elements of intellectual and artistic progress, were wiped out. The objectives of the statesman, the

thinker, the artist, the gentleman, the farmer, were supplanted by the sole objective of the Western pioneer: the winning of a fortune overnight. Speed, chance, the most ferocious competition, a recrudescence of lawlessness, a get-rich-quick policy excluding truth and honesty, an inconceivable moral confusion, contempt for every value that did not lead to the immediate acquisition of wealth, exaltation of personal power, utter irresponsibility towards the collectivity and the national heritage, irredeemable destruction of natural resources for private gain—in brief, the most unmitigated form of egotistic materialism known perhaps to history, became the tempo, mentality and consciousness of the nation and ushered in the triumphant reign of the Business Man. That spirit of Profit which had always been a peculiarly redoubtable menace to America's integrity now obtained deification, and the temple erected to it was the Business Civilization of the entire New World.

You might possibly interrupt me here to ask why, in our modern world of industry and commerce, where money is indispensable to everybody in order that he may live, I have singled out America as representative of the business man's philosophy. I quite agree that every advanced country is to-day engaged in business, and, to that extent, is influenced by the banker, the manufacturer, the merchant and the entrepreneur. But in every advanced country except America, the influence of the business man is counter-balanced by forces that spring from other sources, classes and professions. The rôle of business is only one rôle amongst many—incontestably important, but not dominating. Conceptions of a wholly different nature limit it at every turn. In the European democracies, the spiritual teaching of the Churches—very potent in the case of Catholicism, less so in the case of the Protestant Churches but still weighty—militates against it. So does the aristocracy, for although its individual members are frequently poor, as a body it continues to exert an influence on social manners and customs.

Art and science have a prestige of their own, especially in Latin countries, which respect them intrinsically, without regard to the financial rewards they may achieve; the liberal professions have a long tradition of service, which may not always be lived up to but which remains strong and has nothing to do with money; the great schools are imbued with the spirit of learning and have no truck with business standards; and the peasantry, in the numerous Continental nations where it composes the majority of the population, has a particularist mentality invincibly opposed to that of any other class. The values of all these types and groups may be good or bad—it depends upon the point of view; the fact is that they are very sharply differentiated from business values and put up a reaction and a fight which at the very least prevent the business man from becoming the dominant power in the life of a people.

This situation, which still exists all over Europe (barring the totalitarian countries, of course, where the Party is the dominant power), is not to be found in America. She possesses no aristocracy or landed gentry to give her a recognized lead in social customs. She has no authoritative or established Church, which can maintain an independent existence thanks to centuries-old endowments, public taxation or the obligatory support of the State. On the contrary, American churches of every denomination are entirely dependent upon the largesse of their members, and therefore fall under the sway of their richest ones, who are the business men. Her liberal professions are for many reasons—chief of which is that anyone may enter them, no preliminary social standing or training being required—notoriously commercialized. Her schools function under a disastrously subservient régime. Constantly in need of huge sums of money for buildings, equipment and plant (of which they enormously exaggerate the necessity), they are compelled to beg for gifts, and as the gifts can be adequately supplied only by the wealthy business men, the school boards are packed with representatives

of the owning-classes and have become subordinated to the ideas and principles of an intellectually incompetent body of directors. The Civil Services are extremely small, weak, and lack permanency; neither they, nor the Army, nor the Navy seem to have developed the traditions which, in Europe, make them significant factors in the collectivity. The farmers are just another sort of business men, trading in the products of the earth instead of in the products of the factory; their ideal is to exploit the soil as thoroughly as the merchant exploits the market. As to the politicians, they are inextricably linked to the business interests, and since the public expects from them about as much conscience and responsibility and dignity as from hungry coyotes, they see no point in disappointing the expectations of the public, and sedulously refrain from doing so.

Now if you eliminate, as the dominant influences in a nation, an independent Church, an aristocracy, statesmanship, the liberal professions, the schools and the peasantry, you will find that only the business man stands planted on his two feet at the end of the list and that, by virtue of this survival, he represents not merely a function and a career—as he should—but a ruling and practically exclusive control over the activities, institutions and aims of that nation. This stupendous position he has attained in America, where he has established a victorious grip on the direction of her economic, social, political, intellectual and religious life and has thereby created a type of civilization that is unique. Let's look at it.

"My good woman," I hear you telling me, "a grip on the affairs of a country does not necessarily mean the imposition on it of a complete type of civilization!" No, sir, theoretically it needn't. But in the case of America, it did. Business had proved to be a very short cut to wealth, and wealth was, in the absence of other symbols—decorations, titles, badges and the old-world distinctions unconstitutional in the United States—a manifestation of success and power. Business men became leaders. One of the fundamental and

most deplorable traits of the very stupid human race is the impulse to copy leaders, and as Americans are extravagantly imitative and mass-minded they plumped for the pattern their leaders elaborated. It seeped through the whole population and consciously or unconsciously every group reproduced in its own way of life the ideals, standards, habits, manners, tastes and even language of business. Because it was taken as a national model, it grew into a national civilization. Again I put the blame not so much on the business man himself, who is conditioned by his own occupation, as on the American people, who just wouldn't take the trouble to reflect enough to discriminate between values. The Americans have never been victims, in any domain. They've always made their own misfortunes. They have universal suffrage, but they allow their legislators to be rubber stamps for big business. They are equal before the law, but they let their judges be corporation lawyers. They have public education, but they let their schools be directed by captains of industry and financial magnates. They have freedom of the press, but they let their newspapers be owned by millionaires and the richest advertisers. It's they who converted their democratic commonwealth, which had started clear, into a corrupted plutocracy. They've *chosen* their civilization.

The business man to-day is not an infamous scoundrel like his predecessors, the great Robber Barons, the predatory and unscrupulous buccaneers of the nineteenth century. But I think he is a more insidious danger. He's lopsided.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> He could not be anything else. The basic fact of his work is profit. Business admits of no *succès d'estime*, as art does, nor of a *succès de vérité*, as science does, nor of a *succès de l'esprit*, as religion and scholarship do. Success in business is exclusively the extent of the profit one gets out of it. Having got the profit, the business man may do what he likes with it—and in America he frequently likes to give it away in large lumps to public institutions—but that does not modify the necessity he is under, to make it. So everything that is not compatible with profit, he must discard. This affects him both as a human personality and as a member of the collectivity. He cannot afford leisure, which though it is the only means of achieving a fully rounded individuality, is a waste of the time that might be employed in earning money. He is blind to æsthetic interests and to the quality of beauty in existence, for pure beauty



It follows that the civilization which derives from him is lop-sided too.

Before I begin to criticize it, I'd like to state that my quarrel with it is not personal. It happened to suit all my idiosyncracies as a private individual down to the ground and it contributed enormously to the unparalleled happiness of my stay in America. Let me explain what I mean. I am a woman with very moderate, but independent revenues, no family ties, a liking for comfort, a passion for cleanliness and practicality, an execration of chores, an almost pathological irascibility, and a fanatical insistence on leisure. Given such a temperament and such circumstances, I found myself in paradise in the United States. Never in my whole existence did I live, for the same amount of money, as easily, pleasantly and lavishly as there, and I recall especially a period of three months during which I enjoyed so many of the advantages of the business civilization of the country that it seems to me typical. I had taken a little furnished flat, not particularly expensive as flats go—always remembering that rents are disproportionately high in America—in a not particularly big city. To complete it, I bought a profusion of useful, cheap, and pretty contrivances of all kinds from a department-store. I have nothing like the same stock of ingenious and time-saving articles in my costly and modern house in France. The flat had an electric kitchen range, an electric apparatus for washing and drying plates, electric irons and fan, a radio, a refrigerator, a vacuum-cleaner, running hot water, central heating, and—it goes without saying—a telephone. There was no need of resident servants, with whom I do not know how to deal, who poison

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does not pay. He is quite indifferent to the social tendencies and the social results of his enterprises, for if he allowed his schemes to be cramped by consideration for other classes and for nation-wide issues, he would never be able to operate on a scale vast and rapid enough to enrich him. He must supply physical wants and handle tangible goods, for they are more lucrative than the requirements of the mind—so he naturally comes to believe that they are of supreme importance and that in them alone resides happiness. In a word, his *raison d'être*, profit, dooms him to materialism and, in the Greek sense of the term, he cannot help but be a Barbarian.

and corrode my temper, throw me into fits of morbid exasperation that destroy all possibility of mental work, and keep me in a state of perpetual self-reproach. A charwoman did all I wanted in a couple of hours every morning, and then mercifully departed, removing motives of friction for the rest of the blessedly peaceful day. I did not have to bother about meals, as the cafeterias around me were good and varied—and when I desired a change in food the clean and excellent grocers' shops supplied me with innumerable delicacies. The electric range prepared them for me almost without my intervention, and after I had eaten, my white enamelled kitchen resumed in a trice its shining immaculate aspect. I gave my orders by telephone and everything I asked for was brought to me without fuss, without contention, without delay. I was not pestered for tips, the abiding curse of European countries. If something went wrong, which hardly ever happened, I was not compelled to discuss and quarrel to get my point of view accepted; my statements were listened to with politeness and the mistake was immediately repaired. Unburdened by any drudgery, which admirably efficient machines and tradesmen completely took off my shoulders, given prompt satisfaction on all reasonable points, I had so much free time to myself and so little cause for irritability that I grew forthwith into a new, saner, quieter, more humane creature.

Oh, how contented I was! When I returned to Europe my acquaintances were astounded at my transformation, but a few weeks later the old difficulties, recalcitrant or dishonest staffs—I live in a region where, chiefly because of the foreign tourist element which has corrupted them, the natives cheat as they breathe—inadequate machinery, incompetent antiquated shops, had again frayed my nerves to rags and I became insufferable to myself and to others. I realize that it was only because I could spend a certain sum of money, and because my European training had taught me to limit my desires, that materially life in America seemed so untram-

melled and effortless, but my contention is that in similar circumstances, and at the same level, material life in Europe is infinitely more hampered, plaguy and detestably, wastefully wearing. The organization of business has reached such a degree of perfection in America, "service" is so marvelously smooth, quick and efficient, it covers so entirely all one's sensible needs, that no country provides so many opportunities for healthy physical pleasure, rational distractions, and intellectual progress. If the people don't use them in a proper manner, that is scarcely the fault of business.

So much for my personal experience. But American business has done more than promote my own felicity. It invented mass-production. Nowadays it is the fashion for intellectuals to revile mass-production as conducive to a soul-deadening uniformity and a lowering of the standards of taste. The indictment is only partly true. Competition, the exactions and caprices of the public, oblige the business man to vary his models, fabrics, colours, all his wares, in such a manner that the range of choice is immense and the manufactured goods, in every line, incredibly diverse. There is no real necessity to be exactly like anyone else—if the Americans were not so hag-ridden by their mania to be the precise replica of their neighbour, of "keeping up with the Joneses," they would show less monotony in their clothes, furniture and appurtenances generally. Mass-production is unlimited: it is the people who limit themselves to a few styles because they have not enough character to be original. Moreover, since mass-production makes for cheapness, consider how it lightens manual toil and how wonderfully it has enlivened the human appearance. To appreciate its effects, go and look at an American crowd of working-people in the city parks on a Sunday, in Coney Island, in Atlantic City, in any popular place. True, it is a remarkably vulgar and raucous crowd—on the beaches, unsurpassably so—apparently incapable of enjoying itself without jostling or pushing, emitting a cacophony of shouts, screams and loud laughter,

incessantly eating, drinking, chewing, spitting, making love in public, limbs intertwined, and littering the earth with torn newspapers, cigar butts, egg-shells, orange and banana peel, pop bottles and cardboard boxes. (Gods! What a vision of our future ruling class! Why don't we educate it, as we still can—but only just can—before it comes, as it inevitably must, to power?) But in comparison with most European gatherings of workpeople, how gay it seems, how cheerfully dressed, how prosperous, how loaded up with bright gadgets and convenient trifles! There is nothing drab or ragged or miserable about it: the human animal is amusingly and comfortably bedecked. You can't attribute that merely to the better salaries the working-classes obtain. It is also the result of a manufacturing process so abundant and therefore so inexpensive relatively, that it brings its products within the reach of the bulk of the population, increasing its self-respect and the scope of its satisfactions, and decreasing the hardness, dirt, and heart-breaking length of a multitude of menial tasks.

Another good mark for business is the job it performs as middleman. Pouncing upon every discovery of science to make it the principle of a saleable technical instrument, it plays the part of a transmitter of knowledge. Think of the cinema, the gramophone, the radio, the small car. . . . The percentage of people who to-day can listen to fine music, see scenes from all over the world, learn about conditions at first hand, is far greater in America than in the other Continents. By amalgamating in the course of his work the scientist, the artist, the teacher on one side and the inventor on the other, the business man is, though quite unwittingly, the principal purveyor and popularizer of culture in his country. He does not care a jot, of course, whether the culture is turned to account or not—that is out of his province. It is not his affair if the listener-in on the wireless prefers to turn on a noise or a dance or a prize-fight or some sort of Amos-and-Andy stuff rather than the Ninth Symphony

or the Symphonic Fantastique. But he has given the millions who possess a radio or a phonograph the chance to hear Beethoven and Berlioz, and generally to participate in what I might call humanism to an extent not kings, not prophets, not scholars, not philanthropists, no leaders the world has known, ever offered the people.

Now I am going to attack. Over against these achievements must be set the disgraceful spectacle business presents from the moral point of view. It is purely and simply a dog-fight—neither honour, nor pity, nor order are to be distinguished in it at all. It has also introduced a terrifying instability into the national economic system. This is plainly apparent in the number of people of all classes who are completely ruined in periods of depression. In 1933, twenty million Americans, between one-sixth and one-seventh of the population, deprived of all resources, had to be kept by the State. I am told that actually some fourteen million are still in the same position. England and France, in their very worst hours, had respectively two million and half a million unemployed, one-twentieth and one-fortieth of the population. To my mind, the theories and practices of business men in America are chiefly responsible for these conditions of basic insecurity, though I repeat—God forgive me, I am becoming a gramophone, but I really *must* get the facts across!—that the unforgivable docility of the public to the injunctions of business hugely aggravates the mischief.

The business men have destroyed the old notion of saving by appealing to the acquisitiveness, social vanity, pride, shame, fear of the consumer. He is assured that he is “letting down” himself, his family, and America if he does not live up to a certain material standard; that if he economizes, business will crash and no one will have money to get anything; he is not only whipped into spending by the most odious and vulgar and powerful methods of salesmanship and publicity ever dreamt of, but by positive brutality, for manufacturers very often stop making the essential parts of

mechanical contrivances so as to prevent repairs and oblige the owners to demand new models. Compelled to keep up with the appalling increasing cost of what he is hypnotized into believing is the *only* decent way of living, the citizen can make no provision for retirement, old age, illness, incapacity, except by life insurance—and it is extraordinary how many emergencies are not covered by life insurance, and how expensive it is if the insured himself is to benefit by it. I find, too, that the professional and intellectual classes, unless they make their work fit into mass-production—thus attaching themselves to business—are in actual fact unable to maintain the current standards and are steadily sinking into a comparative decline. Again, though it is incessantly affirmed that Labour has risen above the subsistence level, this statement is only exact in the case of certain trades, and setting off even this advance there is the great evil of the deadening routine-methods inflicted on the worker in the factory and the office. Altogether, prosperity under the business dispensation is excessively unequally distributed; it is peculiarly impermanent and its ghastly cost, accelerated every year, threatens to be prohibitive.

But in the last analysis civilization does not proceed only from economics, any more than it does from opportunities and technical performances, so the economics of America, though bad, cannot alone damn her business régime. What damns it is a horse of a different colour. Fundamentally civilization rests upon ideas, and the quality of its ideas is the criterion of its worth. I should be mad if I declared that I know all the ideas of America. I can do no more here than indicate what impressed me, a foreign visitor, as being ideas so prevalent as to justify the term of “business civilization” given to the *obvious* national mentality.

1. To determine the importance of something, the touchstone which the immense majority of Americans apply to it is that of its immediate cash-value—*how much money there is in*

it. Thus the cash-value takes overwhelming precedence over the intellect-value, the pure learning-value, the spirit of the arts and the disinterested tradition of the liberal professions, though, praise be, it has not driven them out completely. As an idea on which civilization rests, it strikes one as lacking somewhat in nobility and subtlety.

2. From the air, by the printed word, with electricity, on every exposed surface, wherever they look, whenever they listen, the Americans are implored, urged, coaxed, persuaded, hallucinated, threatened, frightened and assaulted so as to Buy, Buy, Buy, Buy, Buy, Buy. *And* Buy. *And again* Buy. *And more* Buy. *And yet* Buy. Buy what they do not want; Buy what they cannot afford. But BUY. It is sad to have to say so, but if I were asked to draw a symbol of America, I'd be obliged to depict a nightmarish open mouth bawling "BUY!" Its thunder covers the three million square miles of America. Her other voices are lost in its deafening reverberations. It took every atom of my French upbringing, which makes me prefer death to parting unnecessarily from my money, to resist it. The Americans, who have no French upbringing, have succumbed to it. Never has a people produced so many things; never has a people been made so conscious of needing things; never has a people packed its life, thought and leisure so unremittingly with things; never has a people sweated, slaved and sacrificed its peace of mind so utterly in a race for accumulating things. There is no rest from buying things, no interruption in the effort to make money so as to pay for buying things. Thanks to the monstrous advertising and sales pressure, and to the inordinate suggestibility of the citizens themselves, the whole existence of nearly the whole of the American people is spent *in striving might and main to meet new expenses*.

3. Because business, for its own ends, puts the emphasis on the price fetched in the market and has got the Americans to concur in this emphasis, activities which are not translatable into terms of income are discredited. One of the pur-

suits decried as being totally unmarketable is the cultivation of the self. It is still bracketed with sheer idleness as futile, effeminate, sissy, and even anti-social. You know, the he-man idea. . . . The arts and graces for the female; the real work, hunting the dollar, for the male. In consequence the average American is still like a tom-tom booming out a single invariable note among all the notes that compose the orchestra of life—a rudimentary instrument of insufficient sense and use in the issues that imply an extra-occupational knowledge and philosophy. Yet the Americans are by nature overflowing with curiosity: witness how eagerly they go to museums and in what numbers they attend exhibitions, in the scientific and technical departments of which, especially, they take a tremendous interest. *But they are not guided in a fashion that would permit their curiosity to evolve cultural standards.* Culture is still mostly left to the women, who, unsupported, have imparted to it—in my opinion at least—a biased and very anæmic tinge. And the “art of living” is still hardly known, though it is an indispensable factor both of stable personal happiness and harmony, and of the elaboration of a civilization.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I want to preach a little sermon on the Art of Living. Yes, yes, I want to, even if it is irrelevant. So I'll preach it, but you needn't listen to it—look, I put it in a Note, and it is always understood between authors and readers that readers aren't obliged, in honour, to peruse Notes.

We use the term *Art of Living* too loosely and incorrectly. A distinction must be drawn between the Art of Living and the Technique of Living, for though we commonly confuse the one with the other, they are quite different things. The art of living is the method by which we reach a progressively closer understanding of reality, and therefore progressively more appropriate reactions to it. To practise this method one has to be an artist, the essentials of whom are, first a vision, secondly the power to articulate that vision. The technique of living, on the contrary, is the method by which we adapt ourselves to the conditions of life in such a fashion as to extract from them the maximum of harmony, interest, profit, enjoyment, as well as a pinch of philosophy—and the faculties employed in it (as in any technique) are simply the brain and the senses. Now only an infinitesimal number of persons are artists, with the gift of vision and the ability to express it, so the art of living can be attained only by a very few specially endowed souls. But every normal human being possesses a brain and senses, so the technique of living is accessible and applicable to practically all of us.

In every country, obviously, one comes across individuals who have achieved in their daily existence a successful technique of living. Whether they are Europeans or Americans or anything else, the means that are resorted to are



I think I should be justified in saying that up to a decade or so ago this uncomplicated, materialistic and barren mentality, flanked on one side by superb technical achievements and on the other by great natural kindness and generosity—like a three-decker sandwich—was considered, by the

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the same. They consist of a steady pursuit of such knowable objects as one's own personality, and one's own environment—Self and Not-Self, the two aspects of the apprehendable world—irrespective of how they impress one at first sight. It is primarily a thinking process, a close and detailed analysis, a study of tangibilities, exercised in order to establish facts of temperament and facts of circumstance: what one is made of, and what one's particular life offers.

When these facts are clear to the intelligence, the faculty of discrimination comes into play so as to determine what, among the multitude of facts just clarified, is of the greatest value to the individual. The criteria are, of course, immensely variable: pleasure and pain are the most frequent, but spiritual issues can be the touchstone just as well as material ones, if the individual is inclined to put the accent on experiences of that kind. The point is that in this second stage both the intellect and the senses act together to decide what is of most importance to the searcher, most profitable and precious not at one immediate juncture, but in a largely comprehensive way. Once that is ascertained, adaptation begins, that is, a modification of the facts of personality or circumstance, usually of both, so that a balance is struck between the two with the definite intention of attaining to the fulfilment of those values which have been recognized as the most worth-while. The more perspicacious and intimate the adjustment, the more fruitful in tranquillity, contentment and usefulness the technique will be. It must be noted that a technique cannot be judged from the angle of morality. It has nothing to do with ethics. The aim is strictly an enduringly reasonable and beneficial relationship between the inward and outward world of a man, and the goodness or badness of a technique is measured by success or failure to encompass that aim.

All this sounds easy enough. In effect, it ought to be easy, for every sane creature has the necessary equipment to work it out. But as the majority of us would rather perish than take the trouble to think, we spend our time and nervous vitality in a series of alternating grabs and relinquishments that approximate to mental epilepsy. Of all the factors of civilization, the technique of living is perhaps the one which is practised least.

Before the World War, it seems to me that the leading European peoples had acquired something like a technique of living, each in their own way—the French having evolved the best method I know. The Frenchman has a host of weaknesses, some of them pretty mean, but none that precludes the construction of a technique. He is to a highly exceptional degree a thinking animal, with an overmastering need for light and precision, so he is spontaneously attracted towards that classification, that study of connexions and mutual dependencies which is the first step to the comprehension of life. He puts a tremendous emphasis on individuality, on the dominion of the self over the system, so he exercises discernment and choice. He is unsentimental, eschewing romance and visionariness, sweeping ambition and desire, so he does not fall into make-believe, but retains the firmest grip on reality. He has a keen sense of measure, proportion and rationality, so he accepts the implacable limitations of being, and his chief preoccupation is to arrange them in an orderly and accurate pattern, and he is singularly free from religious fetters, especially where sex is concerned, so his is the least inhibited of modern minds. In brief, he is excellently fitted to enter into a lucid and harmonious partnership with things as they are, and sagacious enough to avail himself of his opportunities.

world at large, to be the American civilization. I hold no brief for the analytical intelligence of the world at large, but it is difficult to see how it could have avoided coming to that conclusion. Business activities and standards stood out in America as obtrusively and unmistakably as mountains on

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But since the World War, a vast deterioration has occurred everywhere in Europe. Under the surface, she is living in a state of alarm and insecurity. She is gnawed by fears of war, of unemployment, of the loss of a life-time's savings by inflation, of political upheavals and social disturbances. Such anxieties are destroying whatever techniques she had developed. What is one to study, and how is one to become adjusted, when circumstances change violently from day to day? Uncertainty produces a hand-to-mouth attitude to life—the negation of technique. Moreover, in the dictatored lands which now include the major portion of the European population, an iron regimentation of thought, speech, emotion and conduct is imposed. It rigorously eliminates personal perception and free reactions, and has moulded the people into automata. They accept ideas of a specific nature and obey specific directions, they do not analyse and elect. This, too, is the antithesis of technique. Lastly, Europe is being swamped by mass-entertainments, the cinema, the radio, rapid locomotion, popular sports, all of which represent a concerted rush at immediate sensations. Mass movements of any sort blunt the brain, the feelings and the taste, there is no longer a reflective co-ordination between the self and exterior objects, but the complete subjection of the former to the latter. It spells conformity to an inflicted model. Driven out of stability, liberty, privacy and individualism, the European is fatally losing the very materials indispensable to a technique of living.

What about the American? Well, the incredible thing is that he's never had a technique of living. He would not evolve one. He ought to have evolved one, for his advantages were immeasurably greater than those of the European. His geographical and topographical wealth gave him an enormous liberty of scope and variety of stimulus. His political status, in theory at any rate and relatively to all Asia and the main part of Europe, ruled out inequality of opportunity and administrative tyranny, two of our permanent sores. His psychological outfit was better, expressed in terms of an inexhaustible vitality, resiliency, optimism, industry, and of freedom from the strangulating traditions and the historical hatreds and distrusts that poison and sap the European mentality. His material background afforded him, by the perfection of its machinery, the unrivalled chance to put an end to the drudgery of mind and body which prevents poverty-stricken peoples held down to incessant manual toil from attending to anything except the urgent necessities of living. Logically, his mechanical framework should have provided him with more leisure to think and enjoy than any race has obtained on the planet since the beginning of man's history. When I went to America, I marvelled at these unparalleled privileges and expected to find that they had resulted in a technique of living just as matchless as they.

I found nothing of the sort. There is, of course, a way of living peculiar to America, comprising infinitely more practical facilities, newer and bolder activities, a kindlier, more flexible and direct social intercourse than at home. Compared with us, the American is still able to forge ahead in many directions. Because of these conditions, people can lead an unbelievably pleasant existence. The wherewithal for happiness and interest is superabundant. But pleasure due to delightful conditions is not technique, any more than a man letting himself be borne onwards by a gigantic smooth wave is a swimmer. It involves no mental or emotional growth. Looking at the country *in toto*, I was forced to

the face of a desert. For over a century no political philosophy had been produced by her, no school of thought, literature or art. The world acknowledged her superiority in trade and technique, took her methods as an example, and on many points followed them—but there her lead ended. No other direction was imposed; it could not even be proposed, for whatever else may have been churning in the American cauldron, it did not break through the tight-fitting cover constituted by the Business-Man's Civilization, such as it was.

To-day things are changing—indeed, they are whirling. As I see the American home scene—remember, I have no imagination—it is a vast threshing-floor where a very confused but energetic jig is under way. In the midst of the

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recognize that the miraculous gifts and chances and riches the gods had rained down on America were neutralized, from the point of view of a technique of living, by her own deeds

A rapid and crude exploitation of her natural resources took the place of the gradual accommodations which compose civilization. The independent spirit, the useless energy and enterprise with which she started degenerated into bullying and rapacity. She misconceived and misapplied education, in that the prevalent function and significance of her schools is actually to give her youth the means of acquiring material and social prosperity rather than teach behaviour and build up character. She enthroned the sense-pleasure principle, the doctrine of a "good time," a boisterous and entirely aimless manifestation of mere physical exuberance, over every other guide of conduct. She intensified her machinery so inordinately that it became, not as was originally intended, an aid to balanced living, but an obstacle, atrophying her intelligence and vulgarizing her sensibilities by those mass-entertainments that have now vitiated Europe also, and invading those processes which are required for the understanding of reality. Things like the popular screen, tinned foods, pulp magazines, luxuries on the instalment plan, all these machine-made articles, all her extravagant gregariousness, are illegitimate substitutes for the real articles, for natural food, good literature, honest art, privacy, and rational comfort obtained on a secure basis. Owing to all these falsifications, the trend of America has been, for the last sixty or seventy years, towards dehumanization.

I say again that I am speaking only from the standpoint of a technique of living. America has magnificent victories to her credit in other domains, but what concerns me here is that in this prodigiously lucky, capable and intelligent country, there is a quasi-universal practice of indulging in formulae, slogans and impulses instead of thought; subservience to manufactured standards and fabricated tastes instead of personal choice; and exploitation instead of adaptation. If Europe is undergoing a regression in the technique of living, up to the present America in general has skipped that phase of development altogether. A very powerful agent of human happiness and wisdom is fast disappearing in one continent, and was never utilized in another. We are an imbecile species.

threshing-floor is planted the massive edifice of the Business Civilization, but all around it the quick violent hostile dancers give it kicks as they gyrate. It has not been overthrown, certainly not, but it is being battered at. The New Deal has challenged its values, questioned its legitimacy, modified parts of its structure; Labour is organizing itself against it; a rapidly-spreading process of popular education has begun on issues directly opposed to its objectives and influence. And anyhow, its base is a threshing-floor, no longer a rock—there may be sand at its foundations. I have not sufficient subconscious information about America to say when the jig will be finished, nor what aspect the home scene will reveal when it is over, but sometimes I feel that while the American people are revolving so wildly, their native genius is seeking a new expression. If I can make up my mind about that expression, I'll tell you in the last chapter of this book, my summing-up.

## CHAPTER VII

### OF SOME BASIC AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

#### § 1

*CONCERNING MARRIAGE.* The most recent statistics I got hold of informed me that out of sixty marriages in America there are ten divorces. The percentage, in the European countries I know best, is lower ---France has only one-third as many divorces as America--- but these figures do not justify the European belief that American married life is disastrously unhappy. In effect, I do not think it is particularly unhappy, for although its theory is different in many ways from the general Continental theory, it corresponds to the temperament and circumstances of the people. A criticism of it really implies criticism of the predominant trends of life in the United States.

All one says about the American woman is known and super-known already, thus it will surprise nobody if I state that she is given her head by the male much too much for her own good and for his own fun. The usual explanation is that in colonial times there was such a paucity of women that it put them in an advantageous position, but this view is not at all corroborated by historical chronicles and novels, in which women are hardly treated as queens. On the contrary: the authority of the male appears to have been very heavy-handed. I believe American women won their privileges simply by their own capacities, a healthy streak of self-assertiveness, and great perseverance. Anyhow, whatever the remote reason, now their situation is uncontested, though I point out emphatically that this assertion applies to the women of the bourgeoisie (big and small), and not in the

least to the women of the rural classes and of the lower proletarian classes. There they have not been exalted into little tin goddesses—far from it—but have the subordinate social status, and get the pretty rough treatment, which are the lot of their European counterparts.

In the nursery, courtesy and chivalry are enjoined upon the little boys and they are taught to fetch and carry for the little girls. Throughout adolescence, the latter have *beaux* as a matter of course. In youth, the woman's privilege is to collect boy-friends, "dates," and presents—and in marriage the idea is that primarily the husband should be a steady and very generous provider. By and large the American man has fallen in with these conceptions, to a degree which I find both undignified and stupid; he dances attendance upon his girl, who in no wise confines her interest to him alone; frequently spends much more than he can afford on her, for courtship, with all its prescribed little gifts, is an expensive thing in America; and when married, allows her to take the exclusive lead in social matters. It is all very delightful for the woman; I do not blame her in the least for making hay while the sun shines, and if the male is relegated to an inferior rôle, that's his own funeral. I suppose that if he really didn't like it, he'd put his foot down; since he doesn't, why should anyone worry?

It seemed to me that a good many American women, especially in the prosperous middle classes, which are also the classes where most divorces occur, appear maladjusted to the matrimonial state and give an effect of discontent and frustration. Both sexes must share the responsibility for this dissatisfaction. Partly the fault lies in the tradition of the average Anglo-Saxon male. In direct opposition to the average European male, for whom the constant and intimate company of women is a close and integral part of his psychology, the adult Anglo-Saxon tends to separate his occupations and pleasures from those of his mate. His basic formula is, roughly speaking, to give her a lot of money and

leave her alone. Whether this is humility, a conviction that he is inferior to her and bores her; or selfishness, because masculine companionship, his business, his particular relaxations, interest him more than she does; or because, immersed in work, he has neither the time nor the energy nor the ability to meet her demands for development, I do not know. In any case, by means of his affairs, his clubs, his special sports, he is always trying to live away from her mentally, and ordinarily does so with full success.

This cuts both ways. The American husband deserves very good marks for his indulgence, generosity, kindness, tolerance, courtesy—at least in public—his disposition not to fuss, not to be jealous of his wife's successes, not to interfere in her career and amusements, in whatever she may do to express her personality (though often enough it does not justify all her pretensions), and for bearing willingly the onus and expenses when it comes to divorce. He does recognize that she is a human being with needs of her own, and not an appendage. On the other hand, he lets go so much that he appears incompetent to his spouse in every sphere outside business, and if you appear incompetent to your spouse, you cannot expect her to look up to you with great esteem. Nor can you satisfy her when you envisage her needs almost exclusively as material and when, even with the best intentions in the world, you starve her intellectually and spiritually. Accustomed as I am to the excessive intimacy between husbands and wives in France, the detailed knowledge they have of each other's objectives, tastes, pursuits and acquaintances, I was continually astonished by the poverty of conversation of American couples and the strange ignorance, revealed suddenly in unexpected discussions, in which the partners were of one another's activities and even predilections. Naturally they had common preoccupations, especially when there were children, but they seemed to me able to meet only on the grounds of obvious topics. It is anything but the rule for an ordinary husband and wife to settle down to

talk over, seriously and exhaustively, for their own instruction and benefit, an abstract subject—or one that implies non-utilitarian knowledge. Their intellectual and spiritual progress is an entirely personal and separate affair, and the theory that marriage is, quite as much as a physical union and an economic organization, a mutual completion of minds, is outside their run of marital philosophy in general.

This attitude is the more unsatisfactory that the American woman is incessantly, overwhelmingly conscious of sex. She strikes me as the most manifestly sex-ridden female I've ever met. That doesn't necessarily mean that she's more so at bottom than Continental women (in her obsession with men there is doubtless a great thirst for power), but she shows it much more plainly and tiresomely. Her life before marriage is an extravagantly open chase of the male, and the insistence with which she clamours for his homage is very vulgar. I remember saying this in my chapter on New York—it was one of the first things that repelled me with regard to the women there. But I must repeat it, for as I travelled through America, I discovered that the conduct I had imagined to be peculiar to the New Yorkers was quasi-universal, though in the South it is considerably toned down by incomparably better manners and a discretion imposed by a still "old-fashioned" public opinion. The American woman is dreadfully sentimental, for one thing, affecting to hold the love-relationship to be the most important in existence. She'll announce, or her parents or friends will announce for her, that "she's in love," as if it were the very peak of the heights to which her being can attain. For another thing, her naturally inordinate appetite for sentimentality is constantly stimulated by newspapers, the cinema, countless idiotic magazines full of the most maudlin love-stories—which she devours—and, of course, advertisements. Even if she were unsentimental, it would be impossible for her to escape unscathed from their all-pervading cheap suggestions: almost everything boils down to a peremptory order to develop



sex-appeal on pain of being mateless for ever, a failure and a figure of fun. Advertising has reached pinnacles of indecency which are positively marvellous in a country that still asserts the Latins are shameless—if the women, and their men, don't know all there is to know about the bad smells, the physical blemishes, the special diseases of the female body, it certainly isn't the fault of the advertisers! I sometimes wonder how an American male dares to marry: he sees and hears so much about the evil breath, the perspiration, the pimples, the superfluous hair of his prospective spouse. Well, well. . . . Good taste is not the outstanding characteristic of the democratic American masses. *No*.

But the American man is not alone to blame if his marriage goes awry. The exorbitant sentimentality of the American woman does not make her romantic, if by romance one understands a mixture of wonder, exclusiveness and devotion. I find her extremely promiscuous in her sex-life, all out for sensation, flattery and enjoyment, and very animal in the easy way she allows herself to be pawed about—"petting," it is called—by almost any acceptable male. I don't know what is the proportion of women who are physically virgins before marriage—it seems to me that it must be small—but from the point of view of sensations, and sensations due to the caresses of a large assortment of men, hardly any American girl can come chaste to the state of wedlock. They are *des demi-vierges*. They may stop at the threshold of complete physical experience, but all the preliminaries are known by heart, and have been rehearsed not with one suitor but with many. It is really lucky for the girls that American men are usually so very non-possessive.

Nor does the exorbitant sentimentality of the women prevent them from considering marriage as a highly competitive affair and infusing into it a spirit of commercialism and restlessness which cannot produce stable contentment. A "good" marriage in America is a materially successful marriage. The business values dominate it, as well as the uni-

versal aspiration of "keeping up with the Joneses." Happiness in marriage is not judged by compatibility of temper and spiritual affinity, but principally by the things a couple can pile up for use, and these things are constantly being compared to the things the next-door couple has piled up for use: income, houses, furniture, cars, dresses, also the number of voyages and the frequency of entertainments. The American woman, when married, is as incessant in her demands that marriage should increase her benefits and enable her to hold her own against her social rivals as she is agitated, when single, in her attempts to better her personal career. Many people have told me that since the Depression the women have learnt to drop some of their exactions and to play the rôle of helpmeet rather than that of an object of luxury. But I am hampered by the fact that I did not know America in pre-Depression times and so I cannot tell how far the information I received is accurate. I must confine myself to my own impression, and my own impression is distinctly that the married women are not very lenient with their men when things go badly, and when they go well, claim—and obtain—for themselves the lion's share.

A curious fact concerning the American woman is that, say what one will about her advantages, as soon as the freshness and colour of youth have left her, she is far worse off, *vis-à-vis* men, than European women of middle age, unless she is already married and has established her position. In Continental countries it is not indispensable to be young so as to attract a man and have interesting and stimulating relations with him. Not only does he like, but he requires maturity, and an intelligent experienced woman can have a very potent charm for him and keep him steadfastly by her side. But in America the men are extremely apt to shun her, either through fright of her assured personality, or through a real physical distaste for age. Most of them want a gleaming figure-head of sheer youth, particularly for "stepping-out," in restaurants and shows and

wherever there is an audience. I believe the American thinks it reflects on his manhood if he is seen accompanying in public a woman who is not shiniingly young-- though that manhood is rather dubious, if I am to trust the conjugal confidences I was honoured with in America. Never in my life did I hear so much about masculine impotence and inferiority complexes, or so many wives express an exasperated desire to send off their husbands to a psychoanalyst for treatment. My own opinion, *sous toutes réserves*, is that the average American is AWFUL in courtship: no notion of any subtleties, the crudest and most mechanical caresses, the vocabulary you might expect from an automaton (six or seven words, assuring "Baby" that he "feels fine"), and an emotivity that throws him off his balance immediately. As a lover, I'm inclined to think he is a wash-out, and from the viewpoint of monogamy his much-vaunted dutifulness is more the result of a social or material necessity than a spontaneous ideal, for the behaviour of American men abroad shows that their conception of fidelity varies according to location. Still, in their homes, they are much easier if much less interesting to deal with than European husbands.

All in all, considering the subservience of the masculine sex and the intelligence and energy of the feminine sex, I do not feel that the American woman manages marriage at all remarkably. Just as, considering her financial power and her political freedom, I do not feel that she manages political and sociological matters at all remarkably. Something essential is missing in her brilliant composition. I think it is wisdom.

## § 2

*Concerning Children.* I am interested in no mind that is not adult, so I do not care for children anywhere.

Moreover, I do not approve of the way in which parents in any country bring them up. The French, notably, press

them too quickly into maturity; the English leave them too much to the training of schools.

But never have I liked children less than in America, nor disapproved more of the way in which they are brought up. Even after making allowances for the prejudices to which I have confessed, American children struck me, with few exceptions, as detestable, and American parents, with equally few exceptions, as senseless.

The best of the children I saw were, when small, undisciplined, exacting, boisterous, inquisitive, very sure of themselves, all over the place with their games and their questions, as well as intelligent, healthy, and agreeable to look at. The worst of the children were of a particularly precocious type, delicate, shrill, nervous to the point of hysteria, tyrannical, capricious and ill-mannered in the extreme. Both categories, normal and abnormal, were allowed to be much too noisily tireless during the day, to stay up much too late at night, to give their opinion unasked on every subject, to indulge inordinately in amusements, and to frequent many too many movies. As they are saturated with scenery, murders, asinine love stories and cynical representations of life, they are in general unimaginative, accustomed to sensationalism, and impervious to wonder. My lasting astonishment is that, raised in such conditions, they should later on be able to turn, as they do, into sane and nice men and women.

Looking at the adolescents of both sexes—still as a spectator only—this astonishment was aggravated. The ideas uppermost in their heads appeared to be boy-friends or girl-friends, "dates," pleasure, and intense social competition, the stress being put on having or doing or being exactly what the others had or did or were. In their homes, when they were called in to see visitors, their conversation, as far as I could judge, consisted mainly in flatly contradicting their parents; or snapping at them, mostly to inform them that they were back numbers and idiots; or announcing that they were off to a show, a game, or an appointment. There

was no question of asking for permission: they just declared their decision to do something, and forthwith set about doing it. I got the impression that they jealously excluded their elders from their occupations and associations, settling their problems among themselves. Their most intense life is out of their homes. I do not say that they displayed no affection, but it was uncivil and inconsiderate, with a very evident tendency to be parasitical, to take all they could as their due, and to be supported as long as possible. Of course the process of emancipation from family strictures is going on everywhere, but in America it seems to have taken place with a rush, sweeping away deference and the activities in common which might make—and still do make in Continental Europe—for closeness and cohesion. Either because the young in America really take intellectual shape very slowly indeed, or because they are on their guard against the older generation, I found them, when in their teens, the dullest and most callow lot of cliché-stuffed adolescents I've ever encountered. Yet in spite of their fierce independence they are, in their social ambitions, their sex relationships, their language, their habits, in drink, dress, and amusements, an exact replica of their parents—and how absurd, how shocking it is that adolescence should have no distinctive atmosphere of its own, but be just a precocious aping of all the less admirable traits and customs of a time-worn elder generation! I find no charm in American youth, and no pleasure in contacts with it.

But if the children irritated me, the parents maddened me. Their attitude can only be described as a capitulation. They are loving and generous, excessively anxious to heap advantages and enjoyments on their offspring—education, sports, dresses, dances, holidays, trips—to their detriment, for their children's welfare comes before their own. That may be unselfish, though I think it very unwise to place such enormous insistence on material happiness, but underneath the unselfishness I perceived, to my horror, a half-neurotic con-

viction of—what shall I call it?—guilt. American parents are *apologetical* towards their progeny. It is much more than conciliation: I'm hanged if it doesn't look like gratitude that the children don't boot them out of the very home they keep going. And *how* they praise them—fulsomely, inexhaustibly, to their faces—chattering endlessly about the smartness, cuteness, beauty, personality and gifts of all those quite ordinary badly-bred brats! This cringing surrender all along the line started, people told me, after the War; I can't say, for I don't know how American families were trained in pre-War times. But certainly it has been complicated by the quarter-baked notions concerning "modern" education that are rife. You are drowned in a voluble, enthusiastic, and ignorant torrent of talk about "repressions," "inhibitions," "complexes," "extroverts and introverts," and the perverted inventions of Freud's obsessed erotic mind. Everything connected with any kind of politeness, obedience and self-control is proclaimed to be injurious to the right development of the child's personality, and conducive to dark knots and tangles in its mentality. "She's a problem-child," American parents will state, with the craziest complacency, of an ill-mannered, egotistic, disgustingly over-sexed youngster, for whom the most effective treatment would be the age-long sensible French remedy of a slipper sharply applied to the behind. There is no comprehension of the heavy and fatiguing responsibility put upon the child itself by these uncritical conceptions of freedom from restraints, of letting it grow up as it will, nor of the perplexity into which it is plunged by the lack of expressed standards. What happens in practice is that, as it cannot do without guidance, it takes its standards from its little world and starts its thinking processes on the lines of the conventions of the group it belongs to—which is another reason of the mass-mindedness of Americans. The whole thing is a partly amusing, partly terrifying instance of the way in which this shallow, curious, easily-excited people throw themselves upon formulæ that smatter of intellectuality,

science or philosophy, adopt them with never a question as to what the new, high-flown, brave-sounding words lead to in psychological reality, and firmly believe they are acting according to the latest word in knowledge. Have I not said a hundred times already that this intelligent nation will do anything save *Think*? Well, I'll say it again. For often I get tired, much as I love it, of its terrible knowingness and its terrible silliness.

My views on the American family were by no means always accepted by the American parents with whom I discussed them, but a good many of them admitted that they had travelled too swiftly and too far from the old ideas of parental authority, and that the results were as bewildering for their children as for themselves. I hope that in their own interests and those of the growing generation, they will promptly travel back at least a little of the way.

### § 3

*Concerning Education.* The theory of education in America is *par excellence* democratic. Education must be made accessible, by means of State institutions, to every child in the land, whatever its race, religion and station. Each of the forty-eight States, however, having by virtue of sovereignty its own programme, with which the Federal Government cannot interfere, the educational system varies according to locality, financial resources, the value attached by a community to schooling, the professional training of instructors, the period of obligatory school-attendance, the prejudice against minorities, and the intelligence of legislators. If the legislators happen to think, for example, that the Bible is an unassailably scientific work, they can pass laws obliging the schoolmasters in their State to teach that the creation of the world in six days is a fact, that the Garden of Eden existed in Mesopotamia precisely six thousand years ago and that

Adam and Eve were the unique couple from which the human race descends—though I have always wondered how, in that case, they explain away the inescapable necessity for incest. They may also, if they wish, compel the schoolmasters to teach that the earth is square and that the sun goes round the moon. We got an inkling of what they can do during the celebrated “Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee. In such conditions it is not possible to say that the country has a common level of education, but certain broad generalizations regarding the principles which underlie the divergences may legitimately be drawn.

I’ve never been in a country where faith in education is as unbounded and zealous as in America—I suppose because there never was a country where faith in the potentialities of the individual man was so profound. Education is the means to erase all inequalities and to achieve all desirable ends. It is the solution of every problem in the sphere of human relationships. Get any group of citizens together to discuss a difficulty or an evil and they will tell you with the utmost sincerity that the remedy lies in education. Belief in it has become a genuine fetish, and as education is identified with the school, the school is looked upon as a worker of miracles and the only road to culture. Consequently the Americans pay for their schools with enthusiastic willingness (the annual budget for State institutions exceeds two billions of dollars), are intensely interested in their extension, and attend them in enormous numbers.

Practically their most magnificent achievement in this line is the single educational ladder. The definite and dominant aim being to render education attainable by All the People, each State has the same invariable and unbroken network of agencies. At the cost of extraordinarily little money every citizen can pass through eight years of elementary school, four years of secondary school, four years of an undergraduate “college” of arts and sciences, and finish up with a “university,” where numerous graduate and profes-



sional schools are united with the undergraduate colleges in a very flexible federation. This single educational ladder is in sharp contrast to the dual system prevailing in Europe, with its abbreviated programme for the masses – though during the last few years secondary education has been made partly free in both France and England—and its very rich offering for the more prosperous classes, which can afford long tuition fees. The only places where a sort of dual system exists in America are the fifteen Southern States, that maintain different schools for Whites and for Negroes, the Negro institutions being, unfortunately, generally confined to the primary level and very inadequately financed. But even there, things are slowly getting a very little fairer.<sup>1</sup>

What with the tremendous zest for, and devotion to, education on one hand, and the single ladder on the other, America ought logically to be a land of outstanding scholars. On the surface, nothing seems to be the matter either with the drive or with the opportunities. But this unpredictable people has managed to give both a lamentable twist.

I did a lot of visiting in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities before I understood what the twist was. In the first place, I was dazzled by the buildings and the equipment. The huge majority of the higher institutions I saw beat, materially, the schools of European countries into a cocked hat. What libraries, what laboratories, what halls, what stadiums! I went about with my mouth watering, and fell into hysterics when I learnt that the school authorities were chronically dissatisfied with these splendours and were always pulling them down in order to erect newer, more hygienic, and more luxurious edifices. In the second place, I was distracted by the life of the “campus,” the

<sup>1</sup> The single educational ladder does not preclude the existence of numerous private schools, religious, or boldly progressive like Antioch College, or for children belonging to families of great wealth and social distinction, like Groton. Nursery schools and kindergartens also play an increasing rôle in America, as well as an immense variety of institutions for the education of adults and for vocational training, especially since the New Deal came into operation and spent large sums on their foundation.

student body—such vitality, energy and high spirits, so many concerts, lectures, shows, balls, sports, more social activities of all sorts occurring in an American college in one month than in a French university in five years. In the third place I was wonderstruck at the multiplicity and immensity of the catalogues: everything, everything under the sun was being taught, and there was a professor for every sub-division of every subject. “But *how* is it, *why* is it,” I asked myself from morning to night, “that with all these incomparable advantages heaped about his feet, to be realized for the stooping, the average American can’t talk, can’t think, and is still crude? What the system produces in the way of an intellectual human being is so incomplete that it bears no relation to the admirable inspiration and the possibilities of the system. Can it be that I am jealous, and see things crookedly, or have things themselves gone crooked in some inexplicable manner?” At last, tired of feeling baffled, I took myself off to a university renowned for its learning and liberalism, in the lovely townlet of which there were also an elementary and a secondary school, and settled down for a full month to study this most important question. I was made exceedingly happy there by the very intelligent professors and the very likeable students, and I came to a few conclusions regarding American education, which I duly convey to you for what they are worth.

It seemed to me that the mischief is twofold. (a) The school, if you remember, is considered by the Americans as a means of reaching every desirable end. But “desirable ends,” in the present phase of American civilization, is another expression for just one thing: material success. Primarily the school is viewed as the instrument with which you fashion your future career. You seek in it the knowledge that will lead you to riches, the connections that will help you in business, the bridge that will span the gap between a lower and a higher social level, and the stepping-stones of a participation in the life of the community that will bring

you practical rewards. The strongest motivation is the utilitarian concept; the weakest, that of a love of intellectuality. Competition begins in the earliest class and is carried on from class to class with increasing vigour. I would not be caricaturing the ordinary American school if I said that scholarship and the advancement of pure learning are the most insignificant of its by-products.

(b) Since the definite and dominant aim is to make education accessible to All the People, it follows that education cannot be maintained on too high a plane, otherwise All the People, given that *dans l'ensemble* human beings are not particularly brilliant, would be unable to accede to that education and the American principle would be defeated. So education is not a selective process, but a mass process. It is not the finest brains that must win through and set the tone, but the majority of brains. That's perfectly all right as far as elementary education is concerned, and the results are excellent—I found that the actual teaching in a well-run American village school was much better than in a French *école communale* and infinitely better than in an English village school, to say nothing of the superb democratic spirit infused in the children by the meeting and mixing of classes between which no distinction is made, barefoot boys and girls sitting side by side with the sons and daughters of prosperous people—and all treating each other as equals.<sup>1</sup> But when the theory

<sup>1</sup> In the secondary schools the same democratic spirit prevails. In many colleges and universities, however, you get "fraternities" and "sororities," self-governing bodies that select students for membership. These selections are made purely by the fraternity, the criteria usually being family wealth and prestige, leadership in student activities, all-round popularity. Scholarship, as far as I could judge, is the last of the qualities required. Fraternities and sororities have thus become entirely undemocratic elements which are responsible for a good deal of social snobbishness. Laws prohibit them in public secondary schools, and the general tendency to-day is to disapprove of them, but they still flourish in the higher institutions. Over against them must be placed the admirable practice of "working one's way through school," that is, the practice common among students of engaging in some kind of remunerated labour, during their leisure hours, so as to meet the expenses of their schooling. They do anything, from the heaviest sort of manual work to tutoring in an intellectual branch. No social stigma is attached to such toil; on the contrary, the "working" pupils are respected for their energy, enterprise and determination by their companions and teachers alike.

is applied to superior education as well, the consequence is another pair of shoes, and to my mind, a shoddy pair of shoes. For to allow All the People access to the higher schools the hurdles have been so abased and the standard of admission at one end, and that of the final tests at the other, has been so lowered and lowered, and yet so much more lowered, that superior education has come to mean anything except the proof of remarkable mental capacity and erudition. I do not carp for the sake of carping, but I cannot blind myself to the fact that the colleges, for all their comprehensive programmes, their abundant staffs, and their gorgeous equipment, turn out in far too easy and plentiful shoals, graduates whose general intellectual quality is inferior to that of a French *bachelier* at the end of his *lycée* term—that is, secondary education only. The American régime is *the régime of Facility*. There is no aristocracy of the mind. Graduation is a matter of course. Doctorates are conferred like slices of bread and butter on the most indifferent candidates. In the schools I mentioned, I was entrusted with essays and homework which I had asked to read. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw that different professors had bestowed upon them ninety or ninety-five marks where I would have given, in a burst of angelic clemency, ten or fifteen. (I too hold a doctorate and once upon a time I taught contemporary history and literature in an "École Normale," so I have valid points of comparison.) I was not surprised to hear that students take their work so casually that there is a widespread and rapidly growing body of campus "ghost writers," undergraduates who compose papers for other undergraduates and are paid for such disgraceful cheating. A good grade is guaranteed or the money is refunded! It is becoming quite a lucrative racket.

Unless you get a group of students who have been caught up in a wave of particular keenness—mostly political—the discussions you have with undergraduates and graduates in their twenties take you aback. I do not say they know

nothing. But the processes of deduction and inference, of synthesis and linking-up, of *relating*, which constitute thought, are almost entirely missing. It is not really discussions you can carry on with them: it is a series of questions you must doggedly and probingly ask them, painfully astonished the while at the evidence the answers present of a complete unfamiliarity with personal reflection. In my travels, whenever I found a university I was invited to talk to the students; whenever I talked, I had the impression that I was addressing, not my equals in curiosity and information, but pupils whom I was compelled to lead from one point to another in subjects that were not a speciality but just topics of general thinking—and that, even when the issues we debated had to do with America, not with Europe. It may be unreasonable, but I insist that an institution of higher education must produce as its finished article a highly-educated human being, and that universities have no business to hand out degrees to all and sundry, like a pastry-cook hands out hot cakes.

There are several additional factors that contribute to keep standards low. In the secondary schools, the great majority of the teachers are women, and although they are the most devoted teachers I have ever met—too devoted in fact, for they so ardently wish their pupils to be happy that the consideration of happiness takes precedence over the consideration of learning, and what on earth, I ask you, has the one to do with the other?—they are handicapped by under-training, under-payment and a lack of experience. The sex code in many systems is so rigid that a woman teacher has to be severely chaste, and if she marries must relinquish her position. To a lesser degree, the male professor is also subject to social pressure. Though the relations between himself and his students are usually delightfully free, friendly and informal—such a change from relations in Europe!—public opinion exacts that he should lead a perfectly exemplary life in order to set the proper pattern to his pupils. An exemplary life can only be the largest common

factor of the various groups that compose the population, so a professor must resemble his own text-book. He is expected to be orthodox, particularly in sex, religion, sociology and economics, the subjects on which most communities still hold conservative views. But if you resemble a text-book, you cannot be anything but a colourless compendium of non-controversial facts. It is true that owing to decentralization, there are universities that encourage a certain measure of originality and even radicalism along some lines, and a professor who is dismissed from a reactionary faculty may be offered a chair in a neighbouring progressive institution—but on the whole, outside the field of the more abstract sciences such as mathematics, physics, philology, where complete freedom of research, teaching and publication are the rule, American professors remain the instruments of social conformity and serve its interests more than the interests of intellectuality. Besides, they are hardly given time to elaborate a theory of their own, for they teach nine or ten hours a week—a French university professor teaches three times less—and they are endlessly correcting themes and dispensing elementary instruction which should have been acquired long before the students come to them. The very eminent professors, particularly those engaged in Europe, seem to be better off: they have leisure for experimenting and studying. In this connection, unstinted homage should be paid to the American universities for the fraternal welcome they extend to foreigners of note, whom they employ with unparalleled generosity and who are made to feel at home by the American staffs in a fashion that can never be too gratefully praised.

I shall never be able to tell you with what loathing I regard the rôle sports play in the American system of education. They alone would suffice to falsify all values and restrict all achievements. It is impossible to make you realize, if you have not lived in America, the preposterous importance attached to those vulgar and wasteful activities. That the

public should be insane about them is already deplorable, but after all the public is itself a silly and common thing—everywhere—with no discernment to speak of, and I wash my hands of it. But that schools, colleges and universities, agencies that mould the mind, should allow the stupid and brutal exercises of the body to set the pace for them and determine their reputation, makes my gorge rise. Yet that is what has happened in America. Such is the preponderance of sports over studies that the students choose the college they will go to not because of the worth of its professors, but because of its victories in the athletic domain. The institutions themselves concur in this degrading view, which is neither more nor less than a betrayal of their mission. They spend hundreds of thousands of dollars to build bigger and bigger stadiums. They attract promising sports-players by the gift of free tuition, by bestowing upon them scholarships which they would be entirely incapable of winning in the regular way, even by arbitrarily passing them in examinations they cannot tackle. The schools move heaven and earth to get famous athletic coaches; they bribe them away from other places; they pay them salaries which are double the headmaster's and eight, ten times more than those of the professors. Why, I know universities that give 36,000 dollars a year to a coach—over seven thousand pounds, a million two hundred thousand francs, the salary of the President of the French Republic! And for what?

My God, I'll tell you for what. . . .! To train two competitive teams of footballers, or baseball players, or cricketers, or experts in whatever the blasted game is. These teams look like particularly horrible convicts and behave like particularly hulking thugs, out for sheer assassination. They appear in the stadium, and at once go into a "huddle," an idiotic ring of bent backs, of arms round shoulders, and of mutterings. Suddenly they break up their huddle and turn into raving mad rhinoceroses. They jump, bounce, trample, kick, kneel, lie, fall, throwing and mauling and manhandling

each other. Never did you see such savagery, such ugliness, and such craziness. These violent efforts to kill by every conceivable method last for a few seconds; then the boring huddle starts again and lasts for ten or fifteen minutes; then the teams murderously rush forwards again; then the huddle occurs again; then the rhinoceroses charge again—and so forth and so on. During this unspeakably clumsy and barbarous exhibition the audience in the vast stadium is delirious, and white-clad epileptics called “cheer-leaders” leap up and down, beating their breasts, slapping their thighs, waving their arms and legs, for all the world like cannibals in a head-hunting dance, to the accompaniment of such senseless and discordant collective yells as would put a horde of drunken monkeys to shame. Add to all this brass-bands banging and blowing, and megaphones braying, and you will understand, I hope, my indignation against educational institutions that, instead of making scholars, breed, for money and popularity, the nauseating lunatics I have much too tamely described. It is the schools themselves that set upon disinterested intellectual attainment the lowest possible premium, intensify the competitive impulse and exalt the principle of individual success. It is no excuse that they are under the control of boards composed of wealthy business men, who impose their standards of practical utility on the entire system to the detriment of abstract disciplines, for I shall never admit that the schools have the right to yield to business men the power to bend them to their will and so to become *the arbiters of learning in any country*. It provokes me to losing my temper.

A last point on which I feel very strongly is co-education. America is the classical land of co-education, which represents essentially a democratic and popular response to the problem of providing girls and boys with the same opportunities of schooling. Its advantages in elementary schools and even secondary schools are too obvious to be contested—a more normal development for both sexes, the danger of sex perversion decreased, a sounder basis laid for married and



family life, and a salutary stimulating influence exercised by girls over boys and vice versa. Where I emphatically part company with the theorists of co-education is in respect to the higher schools, and everything I saw in colleges and universities confirmed me in my opinion.

Here you have the young people of a nation neither naturally attracted by the play of ideas nor spontaneously inclined to study, but concentrated on obtaining "happiness," happiness being assessed in terms of activity and a good time. These young people, moreover, are overcharged with sex, for once more I declare that Americans are obsessed with it from the nursery upwards. They meet in institutions where supervision is hardly existent, at an age when not only romantic sentiment is in full swing, but when positive sexual desire is awakened. The boys usually have money, they possess a car, they can pay for outings. The girls are in their first bloom, and the first bloom of an American girl is usually exquisite, enhanced by careful tending and by charming frocks. A host of social movements, dramatic organizations, debating societies, banquets, playing-fields, throw them together—movements which are officially considered to be more important, and are certainly infinitely more diverting, than secluded reading in one's rooms, or sweating over abstruse subjects. Both boys and girls know that, however inadequate their papers may be, they will scrape through their final tests. Even in a strictly intellectual atmosphere, where the stress is on instruction, the temptation issuing from propinquity would be hard to overcome. In a lax atmosphere where the stress is on social interests, there is no notion of resisting the temptation. So the spare time of the students—there's a lot of it!—an immense part of their energy and attention, and all their emotivity are frittered away in courtship (and sometimes in more definite relationships), in storms of feeling, in inevitable jealousies and rivalries. When, bidden to cocktail parties that lasted over midnight, I looked at undergraduates flirting and "petting"

and manifestly distracted by drink and amorousness, behaving, in their teens, like amusement-mad middle-aged wasters and slackers on the Riviera, I wondered what infinitesimal portion of their mind would be sufficiently disengaged next morning for application to study. You can't have it both ways. If college and university years mean anything at all, they mean the period—the only period—when the intellect is clean and free to pursue its distinctive, its invaluable development, before life floods and clogs it with the drama of sex and material preoccupations. Co-education at that age, and given the American temperament, takes away the opportunity youth has for culture—an opportunity which, experience shows, does not lightly recur in the absorbing, complicated and dynamic race of American civilization.

I do not think it possible to sum up precisely the trends in education to-day.<sup>1</sup> The emphasis is indubitably on the positive sciences, the prosecution of scientific inquiry and the gathering of facts and statistics, as such studies correspond to the worship of mechanical efficiency and practical utility, and lead most directly to material personal success. The text-book is still the cornerstone of educational technique, though it is supplemented by individual projects and group enterprises. For the rest, it appears to me that the system is pervaded by great philosophic uncertainty—more, I would say, than in Europe, where classical culture is insisted on as at least part of the basis of education and gives a measure of stability to thought. Sometimes this uncertainty is an atti-

<sup>1</sup> Dr Nicholas Murray Butler's pronouncements notwithstanding. . . . I have just perused a book of his, *L'Américain tel qu'il est*, and the chapter in which he treats of education is about the most pompously shallow and asinine lucubration it has ever been my misfortune to read. It is a shame that we should scarcely know in Europe the real representatives of the highest American learning, such as John Dewey, Charles and Mary Beard, and admirable popularizers and essayists like James Truslow Adams and Hendrik van Loon. We seem fated to see only the mediocrities.

Speaking of books on the American educational system, I wish to acknowledge my debt to an absolutely first-class comprehensive and critical treatise, *The American Road to Culture*, by George S. Counts (The John Day Company, publishers), with whose major views I rejoiced to find myself in complete agreement, though Mr. Counts is much more tolerant than I am and he does not lash himself into fury over sports.

tude deliberately adopted, in accordance with the theory that the swiftly-moving modern ideas and inventions exact, for purposes of adjustment on the part of the individual, wide elasticity and sensitiveness of mind. But more often, it is a reflection of the condition of life in the United States. It is evident that the material foundations of the original agrarian order have already been destroyed by industrialism; now, faster and faster, industrialism is destroying the morals and beliefs which that order had evolved and strongly supported. The intellectuals have abandoned the old vision of the world, and have not yet conceived a new vision. The educational leaders seem to be in the same position; I know they talk and write a good deal about democracy, citizenship, social ethics and character, but the results of their training are not impressively apparent in the rising generation. The schools, caught between two civilizations, on the whole give no guidance. They are afraid of public opinion, of indoctrination, and even of unequivocal formulation. They resort, not to thinking out the implications of culture but, helplessly, to backing the recognized fetishes of contemporary America—so the entire system lacks direction, and at present reveals itself as a drifting in the wake of social forces upon which no authoritative interpretation is set, rather than as a body of articulate doctrines. If I am right in holding that the function of schools is to plan the future of society, not merely to dance attendance on the collectivity, then the educational system is not pulling its weight.

Not that it is pulling its weight anywhere.

#### § 4

*Concerning Politics.* I can resume them in one sentence. Whether they are Federal, State or municipal they are, with scarcely any exception, a Stench, a Hissing and a Byword. And that's flattering them into the bargain.

The Americans, probably three-fourths of whom are honest and honourable in their private morals and life, become crooks the moment they enter the political sphere. Every American knows it. Every American tells you of it. Every American, in one way or another, suffers because of it. Not more than a handful of Americans do anything about it. So it's no use tying oneself in knots over it. It will go on until the Americans decide they won't have it, and then it will disappear, for Americans have a knack, when they are determined, of getting what they want. But actually there is no evidence that they have the slightest collective intention to clean up their Augean stables, so a Stench, a Hissing, and a Byword their politics, Federal and State and municipal, remain.

I do not entertain illusions on the subject of politics. Each country has its own kind of corruption. It is only a question of degree and of manner. In England, social influence and privilege prevail; in France, constant petty bribery, favouritism, the deadly tradition of *pour vous faire plaisir*—to please you—and the instinctive desire to get the better of the State. But the civic conscience and public opinion are against graft; it shocks them. It must be subtle and kept pretty secret, else the apple-cart is liable to find itself upset. In America, the manner is incomparably rawer and cruder, the scope is much more comprehensive—in fact, it extends to pretty nearly everything—and, especially, *dishonesty is not condemned by the honest men*. The spoils system is accepted as the normal, inevitable, and legitimate way of conduct, and the people support it unanimously by appointing party men to be public servants in the explicit hope that manna will be poured promptly and abundantly into their open mouths and hands. In practice, there is almost nothing that is not for sale: corporations buy the law, criminals buy the police, manufacturers and advertisers buy scientists, employers buy strike-breakers, spies and machine-guns, business men buy religious bodies and schools, the Government buys votes. There is

no real objection—it is the custom of the country. All my squeaks won't change it, so I shall let my vocal cords repose. I've done quite enough squeaking as it is. The Americans have perfectly good voices of their own, and it's up to them to bawl loudly enough to be heard. And minded.

It might be useful, though, to know why their politics are so putrid. I asked scores of Americans. By the way, did I ever tell you that you can ask an American anything you like about his country, with the completest directness and frankness, and that you will obtain a direct and frank answer provided he feels your questions are informed by sincerity and fairness, and that you are genuinely and impartially interested in the issue. But if he senses hostility or prejudice or an assumption of superiority, he will be immediately on the defensive, and you will have a very tough customer to deal with. That was my invariable experience. The Americans divined that I am essentially a very simple creature, perpetually puzzled by the fact that men are not saints, and they always explained things to me with great patience. In this case, they said that politics were such a filthy game that decent citizens despised them and wouldn't touch them with a pair of tongs. Therefore they had been given over, from the outset, to scoundrels.

This is a reply which saves face, certainly, but I don't think it is quite satisfactory. The motives go deeper. The genius of America does not lie in the field of political philosophy, which is rather astonishing, seeing that England was always pre-eminent in the matter. America was interested in it for a very brief period after the Revolution, but the interest was not maintained (partly because the chance to make money gripped the national imagination to the exclusion of other questions in the nineteenth century), and the little political philosophy she possesses, coming only from an older age, is archaic. Her tradition is anti-governmental and anti-executive. Her Civil Services are badly remunerated; they are weak and have no social status. Compared with the

prizes business holds out, they offer no promises of a dashing career, so the public departments, though they have their share of loyal and careful administrators, do not capture the most brilliant brains. Rotten but able political societies like the famous Tammany, controlling the docile and unassimilated immigrants, played in with politicians and their favours; crime, organizing itself definitely, bought up underpaid officials; and as the general lawlessness made the distinction between legitimate business and illegality very fine and fluctuating indeed, the line was continually passed by politicians without demur from their constituents. It was all in the atmosphere. I believe the millionaires, after they had constituted their pile, might have been an influence on behalf of honest government, but the progressive tendency to treat them as robbers and deny them the right to assume political responsibility, intervened, and the people who could pay most for honesty were told to keep themselves to themselves. True, they deserved the injunction.

There is another element to be considered, too. Under the compulsion of their Calvinistic morality, Americans are extremely prone to pass laws that are unenforceable—Prohibition is a case in point—and so, of course, large money interests become instantly available to law-breakers. Apropos of this characteristic, I acquired an impression—not very clear, perhaps, but persistent—that, cheek by jowl with their faith in the potentialities of the individual, Americans have the strangest conviction of original sin—the other side to drive and adventure, which are unscrupulous. This conviction produces a curious pessimism, a belief that social organization is impotent. If you organize things, it is successful; if you organize man, it is doomed to failure. Laws, often impossible laws, are voted in order to appease the American conscience, and then they are abandoned because man is a miserable sinner who will always fall back into iniquity whatever you do. It is difficult otherwise to account for the exceptional multiplicity of ordinances, the half-

heartedness with which they are put through, and the passivity with which public opinion accepts their ultimate futility. Even the muck-rakers, some of whom are purely heroic, give up the struggle after a time.

It is all a very great pity, for it makes America steer a most erratic course when the whole world needs an example of steadiness. I recall Emerson's cry: "The old race are all gone, and the elasticity and hope of mankind must henceforth remain on the Allegheny ranges, or nowhere." The prospect for mankind will thus be black indeed if America goes on much longer with her little political game of turning the Allegheny ranges into a heap of ordure.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SUMMING-UP

#### § 1

YOU will perhaps remember—though since I wrote the first chapter of this book floods of words have passed under my bridges—that I went to the United States primarily to escape from the foul and noxious fumes of the European myths. Vigorously and tenaciously, therefore, did I sniff the American air, so as to ascertain whether they were polluting it as well as Europe. I am distressed to say they are, though in America their smell is like that of a relatively small troop of skunks, whereas in the Old World it is like that of skunks piled as high and wide as whole mountain ranges. Theirs is not yet the predominating odour, but it is strong enough to be unpleasant.

(a) *The Marxist myth in America.* Its false philosophy, its barbaric essence, its ultimate destructive designs are, of course, the same as in Europe. Communism, though now established in Russia, has not changed from what it was at its inception in 1917: Stalin's despotism, the Terror, the mock trials, the lies, the cynicism, the fanaticism, the cruelty, the crazy planning, replanning and superplanning, the political conflicts, the violent economic crises, the spiritual degradation, the material poverty, the tremendous cost of living, the dominion of the mediocre, all show how savage and inefficient the system has remained. But after seeing Communist party after party smashed—thanks to the counter movements provoked by the Marxist amorality, imbecility, arrogance, brutality and sectarian narrowness—in every European country except Russia, a series of smashes which



ended at last in the terrific upsurge of National-Socialism, Moscow has learnt a little wisdom. Enough, anyhow, to realize that the mild and kindly bourgeois airs are healthier for its adepts than concentration camps and decapitations.... So the Communist Party in America, as everywhere else, has received orders to "put water in its wine."

I met a good many Communist organizers in the United States, especially in the South, who all held their liquor badly and informed me over the bottle that just as soon as they had made the Proletarian Revolution, I and the bitches like me and my bloody class would be liquidated in a jiffy, root and branch. But such revelations of their touching inmost intentions are only made in moments of alcoholic expansion; generally the Communists, in obedience to the new Moscow injunctions, are more discreet. The American Communist Party has put water in its wine with a vengeance. Once it howled for immediate world revolution; now its publicly declared concept is that of "an evolution towards revolution." Once it damned the New Deal as Fascism; now it damns whole-heartedly all who damn Franklin Roosevelt. It supports Lewis's C.I.O. industrial unionism rather than organizes its own unions. It offers ingratiatingly to withhold its own candidates from Congressional, State and municipal elections, and to vote for progressive nominees, though I have found no party that is in the least eager to accept its open alliance. Its present slogan is (I was sent its most recent proclamations): "For Jobs, Security, Democracy, and Peace"—oh, Shades of Marx and Lenin!—and its programme, ranging from soak-the-rich taxation to equal rights for Negroes is, upon my word, almost undistinguishable from that of an advanced Liberal. It keeps most carefully in the background the real content of Marxist philosophy, and there is no longer any lurid talk of instant blood, flame, devastation and death to be let loose over the country. The face it presents actually to America is comparatively meek.

The Party is numerically exceedingly small—about 75,000

members. But numbers are not a conclusive gauge of strength. The Communists are admirably disciplined and organized, and although they are conditioned by Marxist dogma to such an extent that they are unspeakably dull and narrow and boring, it is impossible to deny the passionate devotion, self-sacrifice and energy which inform their activities and propaganda. They have already had a definite public educational influence, and their appeal is spreading, backed as it is by incessant and convinced efforts. Since they now sedulously refrain from clamouring for the utter destruction of any class, but concentrate on rallying together the unemployed and the under-privileged of every class, their orbit is extending and touching groups in almost all the social strata. They appeal to the farmers whose soil is exhausted or owned by the great corporations and banks. There is not the slightest insistence on the "inevitable" and murderously-enforced disappearance of the propertied farmer as in Russia; on the contrary, the proposed aim is to rescue the farmer from the crushing yoke of finance and business, set him on his feet and give a measure of independence to the Southern sharecropper and the Western agricultural labourer. They appeal—tremendously—to the Negroes, and many Negro leaders have naturally thrown in their lot with the Communists, who worked very courageously for the Blacks and, long before the C.I.O. came into existence, started unions in which they were enrolled.<sup>1</sup> They

\* Undeniably brave and self-sacrificing attempts to unionize Negroes, sharecroppers and agricultural workers were—and are—made by both Socialist and Communist organizers in the South, where such activities are violently opposed and often put the organizers in great physical danger. But these movements are entirely indispensable, from the national as well as from the human point of view. The South weighs on my mind like a ton of lead. I spent several months there, and was more interested by it than by any other region of the United States. But its conditions are heart-breaking, and so undemocratic that they could not be worse in an autocratically-run backward Balkan country. The human and natural resources of the South seemed to me perhaps the most splendid in America, and it was only among its people that I found a conception of life which recognizes other standards than those of pushing ahead in the world and toiling incessantly for riches. The chief service the South renders America is its still obstinate and proud refusal to subscribe to the crude Northern doctrine of practical success, and the good Southern type

appeal to the working-women to support the claims of their men and to stand by their husbands in strikes and pickets; and they help to organize the primary-school teachers, always underpaid, often unemployed, and now, because of the economics practised by States and municipalities, more and more squeezed out of jobs. They teach political economy intensively—from their own angle, of course—and their attacks on the American System oblige their antagonists to present a reasoned defence, so that people in both camps are led to scrutinize and think over, as never before, the issues at stake. Though such thinking does not bring shoals of adherents into the official Communist fold, it certainly increases interest in, and comprehension of, general questions.

It is thus by indirect methods rather than by a full head-long revolutionary charge against the existing system, that Communism now proceeds. What militates against it in

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is head and shoulders above the rest of the types America actually produces. That, at least, is my opinion. But innumerable facts about it are appalling: the waste of its resources, the erosion of its soil, the beastly poverty of its rural slums, its dreadful housing, its starvation wages, its terrible diseases—pellagra, malaria, syphilis—its low level of schooling, its exploitation of women and child workers, its ruined landowners, its dependent tenant farmers, its miserable dispossessed sharecroppers, its great industries that are untaxed and its tax-crushed common folk, the draining of its best blood and talent, the iron domination established over it by the textile, lumber and railway companies, the utilities, the big industries and powerful banks of the North. It is the most victimized part of America, and although nothing can excuse its own manifestations of a brutal, intolerant and reactionary temper, notably *vis-à-vis* Labour and the Negroes, I believe that it is what it is mainly because of the blood-sucking financial imperialism of the North. The roots of the misery and degradation of the South are national, not sectional, and in spite of the exceptional intelligence of its intellectuals and the fascinating programme of its Young-Agrarians, who see its salvation in a modern version of Jeffersonism, I am bitterly convinced that very little can be done to modify basically its plight under the actual economic system. The superb effort of the T.V.A. is the only thing which helps it at present, but to be fundamentally effective the T.V.A.'s endeavours should merge with the planned and collective control of the resources of the whole of America.

I recommend to my readers a first-rate document concerning the South: the Melett report released in 1938 by the National Emergency Council and drawn up, not by the New York meddlers and priers and the New England sanctimonious welfare workers, but by the best and most realistic economists the South itself provides. President Roosevelt calls the South "the nation's No. 1 economic problem," and his Administration is the first Federal Government that has shown, since the Civil War, genuine and consistent concern with Southern politics.

America at large and explains its failure is the prevalent horror and distrust of Radicalism; the origin of Communism, which is European; its names, in many cases foreign and Jewish, and the temper and aspirations of the American people themselves. They want their system of government and their rulers to spring from their own American background and traditions, not from a German-Jewish-Russian invention. They also want, not a socialized order, but a fair and legitimate share in the wealth of their country, so that they should hold property in their hands, money in their banks, and be economically free men. It is logical that the middle classes, which for a long time enjoyed these privileges, should desire them to persist and should detest and fight Communism; what appears peculiar at first sight is that Labour, which did not enjoy them, should have on the whole exactly the same desires and remain impervious to the blandishments of Communism. For it is the general attitude of Labour—the milieu in which Marxism ought to find millions of recruits—that, almost as much as the attitude of the bourgeoisie, blocks the progress of Communism. The proletariat in America is conservative. It is very ready to be conciliating. Whatever the fiery extremist groups may say or do, the working-man, *en bloc*, is no revolutionist. He still has no fanatical hatred of the capitalist. He still has no unalterable conviction that the system is essentially infamous and must be wiped off the face of the earth. He still does not believe that he alone is capable of taking the lead and conducting his country's development. He still is prepared to sit at the foot of Capital's table and help himself to the remains of the huge dish. The one thing he insists on with growing energy and determination is that the remains should be sufficient to satisfy his reasonable necessities. If his demands were met with equity and common sense on the part of employers, with co-operation on the part of Capital, and with adjustments which he himself could freely formulate and which would be practised faithfully by both sides, Com-

munism would have little chance of getting a grip on the total body of Labour—for I repeat that as a positive doctrine it is not making headway, but finds an echo only in so far as it denounces abuses of which the proletariat is becoming more and more aware that it is the victim. If the demands are not met, however, Communism will assuredly spread and America can count on having, one fine day, a first-class bust-up. Personally, much as I abominate and combat Communism, I feel that in America it has had its uses, for it has released and conveyed Marx's solemn warning—his only scrap of nobility—the warning that the “wholly selfish rich, the wholly selfish mighty and the wholly selfish proud may be struck down by the destitute, the oppressed and the humiliated,” and that societies which will not lift the burden of crushing poverty from exploited masses may be torn asunder, as by wild horses, in a vast ruinous explosion of revenge.<sup>1</sup>

(b) *National-Socialism in America.* As National Socialism

<sup>1</sup> Labour in America strikes a European as being in an extraordinarily chaotic state. When I went to the New World, the only great organized body of workers was the American Federation of Labour, or A.F. of L., whose political theory was simply to oppose its enemies and reward its friends, whatever was the Party they belonged to. It had split up the working-classes into an aristocracy of highly protected skills and crafts, for which it had finally obtained adequate wages, and a neglected and abandoned proletariat with not the slightest attention paid to the untrained labourer and the Negro, and there was such a stupefying lack of organization that out of thirty million American workers only three and a half million were unionized. The difference in salaries and working-hours was therefore incredibly fantastic; a carpenter, a mason, a mechanic got as much as one dollar twenty-five cents an hour, while ordinary workers in factories, Negroes, sharecroppers in the South, seasonal agricultural labourers (migratory) in the West, got seven dollars a week and sometimes seventy-five cents a day. I can vouch for these figures. I remember paying over a dollar an hour to a unionized carpenter who put up some shelves in my flat, and to a unionized electrician who did something to my lights; but I found that in California fruit-pickers earned seventy-five cents to a dollar a day, out of which twenty-five cents were kept back for the rent of shacks that a pig would have disdained to occupy. Not to speak of the way these fruit-pickers were cheated and robbed at the company stores. The A.F. of L. was perfectly callous about the small fry in general, and it was this callousness that allowed the Communist and Socialist parties to begin indoctrinating the lower, most precarious and exploited strata of Labour with Radical ideas, for, as I have said already, Communist and Socialist organizers were practically the first people who moved in the matter and tried to unionize the defenceless groups. No foreigner accustomed to the solidarity of Labour in advanced Democracies could have any sort of sympathy with the antiquated policies of the A.F. of L., or its egotistic and frequently unreliable leadership—extravagantly remunerated

essentially means the exclusive supremacy of *Germany* in a country, I think it is so utterly inconceivable that it should ever obtain a hold over the American people, that the matter is not worth discussing. As for me, I did not meet, from north to south or from east to west of America, a single native-born American who wanted to install Hitler, the Racial Principle and Nationhood in the United States, establish the world hegemony of a Greater Germany, or make of America a Nazi tributary. Nor was this the desire of the foreign elements, the Negroes, and the Jews, who know they are regarded by National-Socialism as organically inferior species, and are aware of what is in store for them

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into the bargain. Fancy, some of the presidents of unions receive twenty-five thousand dollars a year! In proletarian institutions . . . !

Some aspects of the relations between workers and employers add a streak of dementia to the incoherence. Looking at the Labour scene, there are times when one thinks one is in a kind of cave-man world, where the mentality is criminal and the methods are murder. Riots, trials, Congressional investigations reveal activities, on the part of unscrupulous bosses and exasperated workers, that partake of the nature of the wildest melodrama. The employers have company unions, paid deputy-sheriffs, guards, spies, provocateurs, strike-breakers, gas equipment, rifles, shotguns, armoured cars—and thugs to operate them. Union leaders and organizers are ambushed, tarred and feathered, beaten up, assassinated. Strikers set up machine-guns, fight with pieces of dismantled machinery. There are battles in the plants, bombing in the streets, shooting all over the place—right under the noses of the State authorities and the police, who, more often than not, are on the side of the big corporations. This is no rhetorical declamation, nor does it only concern past tragical incidents. Read up the recent South Chicago, Johnstown, Massillon, Canton, Harlan cases, look at the news-reels, and you will see that what I say applies to the present situation. I am very far from thinking that the claims and the conduct of the unions are invariably reasonable, but that workers seeking to exercise their lawful right of collective bargaining should be, in a country that boasts of its democracy, slugged, shot, gassed and bombed by the employers, with perfect safety to the latter, on the plea of protecting their property, denotes a rottenness in social affairs which makes one marvel that Communism should not have managed to sweep all Labour to its side. Here and there, it is true, I visited factories and even whole company-owned villages of textile workers—notably a small town in North Carolina where the employers, one family to which the entire little city belonged, had even erected a secondary school—that were beyond reproach and showed what Capitalism can achieve when it is generous and conscientious, but such oases were very few and far between.

Shortly after my arrival in the United States, there occurred a thunderous schism in the A. F. of L., and John L. Lewis, an energetic and truculent Labour leader, full of pugnacity and anathemas, seceded from the parent body and, taking with him some of its principal unions, like the Mine and Steel workers, established a rival association called the Committee for Industrial Organization, or C. I. O. The C. I. O. unionizes "vertically" where the A. F. of L. unionizes "horizontally": that is, it unionizes all the categories and sub-divisions

should the Nazi doctrines triumph. What is true, however, is that some German-American circles have formed themselves into a "Bund," and flaunt a Führer, swastikas, uniforms and the Hitler salute in the faces of American citizens. Furthermore, in accordance with the Nazi dogma that Germans everywhere, even when they are naturalized, belong to the mother-country and must work for the interests of Nazi Germany, whether in stealing military secrets, or setting up semi-military camps, or spreading anti-Semitic obscenities, they started propaganda and spying activities which obliged the Federal Government to interfere. During the legislative inquiry, the Führer of the Bund openly aired

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of a trade in one body, after the European pattern, and includes the Negroes. Its quarrels with its deserted and execrated progenitor, the A.F. of L.; its struggles against the monopolistic industries, coal, steel, automobiles; its long and violent strikes, are already legion. It is theoretically still non-political, but it swung all its members into the Democratic camp during the presidential election of 1936, and in spite of occasional spells of chilliness between Franklin Roosevelt and John Lewis, it has the backing of the Government. Thanks to its agitation and the help of the Administration, some very important measures favourable to Labour have been put through, such as collective bargaining, arbitration, social insurances, minimum wages and hours—rights which, as I pointed out in my section on the New Deal, Labour had obtained years ago in the advanced European Democracies, and which are still much inferior to the privileges legalized by the Front Populaire in France.

Though there always were savage sporadic outbursts of revolt among the workers, as savagely repressed by the employers, the mentality of the bulk of American Labour was very different from the mentality of organized European Labour during the last sixty or seventy years. Owing to the absence of a feudal tradition in the United States, to the immense natural resources, the free access to land and the ever-opening Frontier, the ideals of democracy and equality were more nearly realized in America than in Europe, and the exceptional economic opportunities prevented the stratification of society into mutually hostile classes. Even when the rapid concentration of finance and industry created a plutocracy, these economic opportunities, though they dwindled, were still vast enough to keep alive the faith of the common man in the fairness of the present scheme of things and in the original democratic vision. The aspirations of the American worker were intensely individualistic; traditionally he hoped—and for a long time he was justified in his hope—to escape from the ranks of the employee into the ranks of the entrepreneur or the big employer. This ambition checked the growth of class consciousness, which is, of course, the consciousness on which the theory of social revolution rests; and it was further stifled by the racial antagonisms of a polyglot population and by the rallying to Capital of the middle-class executives and the white-collar workers. Hence the conservatism of American Labour *en masse*. Now the practical reasons for it are fast disappearing. That does not mean it no longer exists, but it seems to me that it continues principally because of the cultural heritage, the old habits of thought, and natural tastes. How long, I wonder, can cultural influence, traditional thought, and personal tastes persist in the face of tremendously, and probably permanently, unfavourable economic facts?

its anti-Semitism, its hierarchical obedience to Hitler, its conviction of Aryan superiority, and affirmed, when asked why the German camps taught their children the Nazi gesture of the outstretched arm instead of the American mode of address, that the former was "the coming salute for the whole of the United States." The assumption is too stupid and the aim is too insane for alarm, but it is as well, though a Nazi State cannot supersede the American Constitution and the bestial lunacy of the reprisals against Jews has aggravated horror of the Reich, that Americans should know Hitler's agents are not idle in their country, and that Germany is trying, there as everywhere else, to spread her antennæ as widely as possible into their internal affairs. Hitler himself was kind enough to warn them that he might take an interest, which would not be pleasant, in the domestic situation of the "nation of people who wear their hats in the house, put their feet on the table, and spit chewing-gum at the walls," but he really is ill-advised to attempt to bully the United States. The country has still too much courage, imagination and pride to knuckle under to a foreign upstart.

(c) *Fascism in America.* As a state of mind, and in its broadest sense of a reactionary movement advocating changes in the status quo—at present, in the New Deal—and proposing to set up a dictatorship to protect such changes, Fascism does exist in America. It exists quite as definitely as Communism, although it is not one homogeneous group, but finds adherents wherever irreducibly conservative interests, both monied and political, feel themselves mortally menaced. Its stronghold is thus preponderantly the Right wing of the Republican Party.

A coherent and active Fascist movement would be opposed by the large masses of organized Labour, the considerable numbers of Liberals (that is, the progressives who also advocate changes in the status quo, not, like the reactionaries, in order to return to the old system but to establish new measures and new institutions to correct the evils of the old



system), the small numbers of revolutionists (that is, the extreme Radicals who believe the changes must be bloody and convulsive and protected by a dictatorship), and by the indebted farmers, to whom an American adaptation of Fascism would mean irremediable subjection to the banks and insurance companies that own their land. I also believe that two very powerful American characteristics would come into play at once against it: one, the incorrigible irreverence of the people; the other, their age-long temperamental antipathy to a violent and aggressive plutocracy.

But over against this specific opposition and these antagonistic national tendencies must be considered the groups to which Fascism would appeal enormously. It goes without saying that high finance, big industry, all the great corporations of every kind would welcome it with joy. So would vigilante associations like the Ku Klux Klan, the Black Legion—whose atrocities exploded over the front pages a couple of years ago—the American Legion, the Silver Shirts, the Farmers' Alliance in California, dominated by Italian-Americans who already sport the Fascist uniform, and those curious State or town dictators America is always breeding, like Hague of Jersey City and Prendergast of Kansas City. The smaller-business bourgeoisie would undoubtedly rally to Fascism if it saw that Communism was successfully expanding, for although its fibre is profoundly democratic, if it were forced absolutely to choose between Communism and Fascism, it would very naturally regard the latter as a little less fiendish than the former. Both systems abolish intellectual, civic and personal liberty, but Fascism retains the bourgeoisie as part of its structure, while Communism liquidates it bag and baggage. Since the spirit of injustice, cruelty and hate, and the terroristic methods are as execrable in one brand of dictatorship as in the other, it is logical that the middle classes of any country should prefer, were there no way of escape, the dictatorship that allows them to live if they are submissive, to the dictatorship that exterminates

them even when they are submissive, simply because of their origin and culture.

It seems to me that Fascism might appeal, too, if the actual economic situation were prolonged, to the majority of the educated youths who are unemployed. They are certainly half the youth of America, and when they leave their colleges, not only have they no jobs, but they see no jobs in front of them. Their reaction against a possible dictator would not be as horrified as one might think. A tremendous amount of mischief has been made already by presenting Franklin Roosevelt as a dictator—a mischief for which many Liberal journalists and writers are fully as responsible as his Right-wing adversaries—so the idea of an autocratic ruler is no longer as unimaginable as it was, say, only a decade ago. The educated young bourgeois in America is not supine. He does not consider with equanimity the prospect of being unemployed for years, or, since the resources of his parents are shrinking, of going on the dole as soon as he reaches manhood. If he becomes convinced that the New Deal cannot cope with the lamentable national conditions, it will not be to Communism that he will turn, for in general he has not the least intention of scrapping his class, as is proved by the scarcity of university-trained converts to Marxism. What, then, remains except Fascism, which in effect argues thus: "Actually, we have a dictator. Roosevelt has challenged the Constitution again and again, and attempted to remodel it. He is dangerous to the foundations of the United States, and yet he is inefficient, for he has neither got the country out of its mess nor given you work. How about a dictator of our own, who will defend the Constitution, assure the rights of every citizen—not only those of one class, which is your deadly enemy—get the country out of its mess, and provide you with activity and authority?" If the Fascist state of mind crystallizes enough to throw up somewhere a dynamic leader with a pronounced gift for oratory and organization—a national instead of a provincial

Huey Long, for instance—I am inclined to think he would have a much better chance of immediate success than a Marxist revolutionary. Not that I see this happening in the very near future, but if America is fated to be swooped upon by one of those three foulnesses, Communism, National-Socialism and Fascism, my guess is that Fascism is the most possible, though not yet probable, of the excremental lot.

(Speaking of “isms” brings to my mind the Socialist Party, and the reason for which it was never a force in America. Socialism at the time of its birth was the only movement that expressed intelligent thinking and that criticized pungently the existing order. It did a good job in unexplored ground, and broke in on the smug satisfaction of America when she was run by the two traditional parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, which in prosperous periods seemed competent enough and encouraged the popular belief that things would always go from good to better. But Socialism did not emerge from its swaddling-clothes. It relied too much on what it thought was its intrinsic worth, which could only be appreciated by intellectuals, so its campaigning—the highly costly and expert business of “selling” an idea—was inefficiently conducted and did not capture the imagination of Labour. It had no organization, no money, and no shrewd practical brains behind it. It wasted its vitality in incessant internecine quarrels, and at last, in the Depression, it was swamped by events nobody had foreseen, which caused its evolutionary doctrines to be judged far too slow for the pressing needs of the times. Communism vigorously elbowed it aside. It is most regrettable that it should have been out-distanced before it matured.)

## § 2

Philip put in an appearance here. He turned out to be more of a Job's comforter than ever.

"If this is the last chapter of a presumably serious study," he said, "it is preposterous that it should finish on such a wambling note. Listen to you! 'There may be Communism; there may not be Communism. . . . There may be Fascism; there may not be Fascism. . . .' Why not bleat: 'There may be an America; there may not be an America,' and have done with the question? What has happened to such few brains as you once possessed, woman?"

I stared gloomily at Philip. It was perfectly true that I had no notion how to round off my book. I was at the end of my intellectual tether. At the back of my head had lurked the half desperate hope that I might get away with a sort of it-is-all-on-the-knees-of-the-gods conclusion, covering with a decent semblance of fatalistic philosophy my failure to pull America together in my mind. Now there could be no facile exit.

"If my publishers gave me more time . . ." I began.

"Nonsense. You are five months late as it is, and as you inform everybody that your book will be a masterpiece, your deluded publishers patiently await your self-advertised sensational parturition. But I could have told you when you started that you were biting off more than you could chew. The Americans themselves, who feel their country, are all at sea about it and don't know where they are drifting. Why you imagined you could settle their problem for them, on your first visit to the United States, is more than I can make out. Now, I suppose, I must come to the rescue."

"Yes, Philip," I said with humility, detesting him.

"But I shan't do your work for you," he said sharply. "Kindly apply the seat of your pants to the seat of your chair. No more lying in bed, no more detective stories, no more melodramatic fights with servants, neighbours and lawyers—look at the *quality* of your recreations!—till you're through with this scamped job. Now then! Get hold of a starting-point. The leit-motif of your book is that America will, in time, assume the leadership of Occidental civilization, and

this, to you, is of supreme importance, for the future of mankind counts for more, in your eyes, than its present. As well it may, since the present spectacle mankind offers is that of armies of mutually devouring rats. But nothing you have written up to now proves your assertion. On the contrary, all you've said shows that America is very badly mussed up—not at all in the state conducive to leadership. Why, then, will she assume the rôle of leader?"

"I know the answer to that one," I replied eagerly. "It has nothing to do with her actual capers. The principal reason for my certainty is that she is the only land which can *never*, whatever happens, be less than a Great Power. Every other country in the world is open to a successful attack—and though not all of them can be annihilated, all of them are liable to suffer tremendous losses and modifications. But the United States, even if in other Continents it must join up with this or that people, is unassailably secure in the American Continent. America can fear neither an invasion, nor a blockade, nor an effective raid from the air. None of her vital interests can be threatened. She can be subjected to no essential defeat (her Navy may be beaten if it strays too far from its bases, but that would only be an episode), and conquest by a foreign foe is materially impossible. By a war, England, France, Germany, Italy, Russia, may all cease to be major Powers, even if they remain races, but nothing on earth, save an act of her own will, can reduce America to the level of a secondary or dependent nation. She is not only indestructible, *she is invulnerable*. Nobody else is.

"... That holds good even if we have a conflagration in Europe, and America—in spite of her legitimate grievances against us, the disgraceful way in which we belittled her help, disappointed her and cheated her after 1918—is obliged to take part in it as, sooner or later, she most probably will. In that case her precedence over us all will be quickly assured, for her perturbations will be child's play compared

with the universal ruination Europe can confidently expect whichever come out as victors, Democracies or Dictatorships. While we creep maimed under débris, America can go ahead.<sup>1</sup>

"... There's yet another reason for my conviction. It is

<sup>1</sup> I earnestly ask my readers not to skip this note. It is an important one. I'd like to make an attempt to explain the main reasons of that American "isolationism" which many Europeans really do not understand on the part of a democratic country. I do not say our astonishment proves anything but our psychological stupidity and our stubborn refusal to recognize that we are reaping the logical harvest of our own conduct—but there the astonishment is. Let's see how most of the Americans argue.

America came into the World War with boundless *elan*, sincerely believing the fight was going to make "the world safe for Democracy." The war over, what did America hear and see? The passionate relief and gratitude with which we had greeted her intervention quickly changed into a continuous backbiting and snarling. We said that she had profited immensely financially and economically, that her army was incompetent, wasteful, and hadn't borne the brunt of anything; "Brave little Belgium," which she had fed for years, called her "Uncle Shylock"; her President's programme of the "Fourteen Points," after having been acclaimed, was deemed the outcome of American ignorance and foolish idealism, and disdainfully dropped. We had accepted all her terms for borrowing money, but suddenly we found them too exorbitant, and refused to pay our debts without even a "by your leave." That she herself, in this affair, showed an extraordinary pig-headedness is beside the point. A debtor who is genuinely going bankrupt is entitled to ask for time and easier settlements, no debtor can scrap, as we did, all his pledges and signatures without losing his reputation and honour. I am entirely convinced that, great as was the sum of which we balked America, the egotism and rudeness of the manner in which we balked her struck her as much more outrageous than the monetary loss she suffered at our hands. She had an unforgettable shock—especially as concerns England.

Americans are apt to be indulgent towards France for many reasons, among which is the sentimental remembrance of Lafayette's aid, but their attitude towards England is much more complex and exacting. Under currents of dislike, irritation, mockery, resentment, there is a great, inarticulate, instinctive love and admiration for England. In spite of all the follies and brutalities of her past mismanagement of America, England stands, in the American mind, for something enduringly good. There was a centuries-old trust in her essential honesty and dignity. When she let America down over the debts, that ingrained trust received a blow of which we have never grasped the magnitude. If England with only the simplest show of regret and good-will had offered to reimburse to America a small sum every year, she could have saved the situation. What the Americans wanted fundamentally was a gesture in harmony with their conception of England, a gesture which would have permitted their necessary, atavistic, intimate picture of her to remain untarnished. England was so imbecile, so loath, as usual, to pay attention to psychological factors, that she did not make the gesture. Some virtue went out of her in American eyes—it wasn't surprising that the other Continental countries should behave like ungrateful scoundrelly defaulters—those were the ordinary European tricks—but that England, whom America subconsciously but persistently respected, should go back, completely and shamelessly, on her pledged word, was almost inconceivable. It was not only a pecuniary loss she thereby inflicted on America: it was an emotional hurt.

A disgusted and indignant America continued to witness the strife, divisions,

the stupendous natural wealth which America still possesses in her own soil. Notwithstanding the monstrous squandering of the last century her resources, if they were properly protected, renewed, and distributed, would be sufficient to support in all the basic necessities three times her present popu-

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lies, treacheries, injustices, violences elaborated in the Europe she had thought to make "safe for Democracy." In 1917 springing up a Marxist system in Russia which made the Czarist system seem liberal, in Italy, another ally, rose the first Fascist dictator, sweeping away the most elementary civic and political liberties; in 1933 the old German militarism which America had contributed to crush—was reborn with National Socialism in a form beside which the Imperial army looked like toy soldiers. The *Drang nach Osten*, that America had tried to end, started again with the force of a tidal wave. In 1918 she had helped to create a free and democratic Czechoslovakia: in 1938 it was rent to pieces, the Governments of England and France presiding over the murder and being glorified by their Parliaments and the bulk of their peoples. She had also helped to create a free and democratic Austria: after two decades of a tragically troubled existence, it disappeared into the Nazi German maw. She had brought into being a free and democratic Yugoslavia, but to-day there is incomparably less freedom and democracy in that country than in Old Serbia, and the "freed" Croats hate their Serbian "liberators" more bitterly and with more justification than any of their past oppressors. She had evolved a free and democratic Roumania from a monarchical Little Roumania, but now Greater Roumania is an out-and-out authoritarian State, its Constitution is abolished, and its Parliament is practically destroyed. She made Hungary free and democratic, and first it went Communist, then it became Fascist, its only alternatives now being feudal reaction or merciless Nazism. The League of Nations declared sanctions against Italy *à propos* of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, a fellow-member; but England and France refused to help with arms the defenceless natives, while they let Italy ship hundreds of thousands of soldiers and incalculable stocks of modern weapons of war across the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal; told, after a few brave words, the League of Nations to pipe down, and acknowledged humbly the King of Italy as Emperor of Ethiopia. Great Britain and France allowed Germany and Italy, co-signers of an agreement not to intervene in the Spanish Civil War, to pour men, guns and aeroplanes during two years into the lap of Fascist Franco. The Japanese aggressions in Manchuria and China were "deplored" at solemn conferences without the lifting of a finger to hinder them. The Jews were persecuted and deliberately ruined in some half a dozen countries. Minorities were Nazified, Sovietized, Italianized, Polonized, with unsurpassable ruthlessness. "Buddy," said America at last to Europe, looking at her gangrenous face, "this ain't quite what you swore and what I figured out you'd be. So I'm through. Now you just go to hell in your own way."

On the other hand, Europe is full of counter-complaints. "Who," she bitterly asks, "after having invented the League of Nations, and got us all into it on the understanding that she would participate in it, kept totally out of it, avoiding all its responsibilities and obligations? Who, when we were building up our devastated towns and villages and economy, and reconstructing our vital defences, insisted on an impossible repayment in cash and defeated all our efforts to effect refunding in goods? In the Abyssinia business, who helped to nullify sanctions by supplying oil to Italy? In the Sino-Japanese affair, who put up just as cravenly as we with incidents like the Panay bombing? Who takes precisely the same attitude towards the Democracies in Europe as the Democracies—though loudly trounced by America—take towards the little

lation. She has every indispensable raw material under the sun and every facility for obtaining by synthetic processes the very few substances Providence saw fit to withhold from her. Her variety of climate, earth and production ensures self-sufficiency on such a grand scale that to most countries

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nations, wishing them long life and happiness but desiring them peremptorily to look after themselves? Whose press evokes awful visions of the horrors of war, passionately urging Americans to eschew all risks and commitments that would draw the United States into a new struggle, and yet, from the vantage-point of three thousand miles, incessantly and contemptuously upbraids England and France for "not standing up to the Dictators"? (I must say that in this instance the American press reminds me irresistibly of that editor who, when his correspondent was half-killed in the exercise of his duties, got up behind his desk and courageously shouted 'No, sir—they can't intimidate me!') Who, though a country where everybody has the same government, the same education and standards and habits and historical background, and speaks the same language, has local dictators and lawlessness and violence and unconstitutionality and mob-fights all over the place—yet reviles a Continent of over two dozen nations, all terrifically different psychologically, ethnologically, culturally, politically, religiously and linguistically, for being unable to drive them in harness? In the last analysis, America is always ready to be excessively valiant *avec la peau d'autrui*—with other people's skin. . . . And as for Democracy, since America herself has overwhelmingly betrayed it in her own set-up—why, she hasn't even managed to settle reasonably and humanely the one little minority problem of her Negroes, and she yelps at us to settle promptly the problem of twenty-seven sovereign States!—though she had the most unparalleled opportunities, quite beyond our reach, to realize it, the less she says about our own almost fatal failure, the better."

Myself, I think both sets of arguments have a certain amount of validity. But they don't get anybody any forrader. To talk practically, however, it seems to me that the isolationist policy of America, intensified, with reason, by the monstrous capitulation of England and France to Hitler on the Czechoslovakian issue (a capitulation which has enhanced, probably irremediably, the belief of the world in the irresistible strength of Fascism), will give way in the event of a new European war, but only if Great Britain becomes vitally endangered. Even the rebirth of a natural sympathy with the European Democracies aligned against the dictatorships in a supreme struggle would not, in itself, induce America to step in, after the experiences she has had of Europe's folly ever since 1914, though she would doubtless send us plenty of aeroplanes, war-material, and food. But if Great Britain sank, it would mean the end of the British Empire, and the dominion of the seas would pass into the victor's hands. America does not mind in the least sharing the dominion of the seas with the British Empire, but she cannot share it with a Nazi German Empire, whose Pax Germanica would be an utterly different thing from the Pax Britannica, which does not interfere at all with America's interests. As I see it, America, in spite of her present determination to keep out of a fresh European conflict, will be compelled to fight because of the question of ultimate naval power and all it implies, as soon as there are incontestable signs that the British Empire is in really mortal peril. But by that time the chances are that even if the Democracies win, the principle and the institutions of Democracy itself will be beyond saving in Europe.

The terrible mistakes we committed, and at the time of writing continue to commit, are at the root of America's isolationism, and logically she can only be accused of a complete lack of magnanimity. Strictly speaking, one is not



it would seem luxury. Except by her own mismanagement she can never starve, and she can never be even degradingly poor. It is out of the question that she should ever be confronted with a *single hopeless economic prospect*."

Philip was looking a little less dour.

"Well, you've advanced at least one step," he said. "Granted that geographically and economically America as a country is in a matchless position for ultimate leadership. . . . But leadership comprises more aspects than political impregnability and inexhaustible potentialities of wealth. What aptitudes have her *people* for becoming the leaders of Occidental civilization?

"... Now wait a minute. Before you rush into an answer, consider the fundamental quality which differentiates Occidental civilization from every other civilization the world has known—Egyptian, Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Phœnician, Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Mayan, Arab, and so on. No one can truthfully say that Western civilization was better on the whole than any of these. Indeed, in many ways it was often worse, for the crimes of Europe, the superstitions and religious wars Christianity engendered, the persecution of the Jews and of minorities generally, the infamies of the imperialist colonial system, the abuses of Capitalism, and *tutti quanti*, give points and a beat-

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morally obliged to be magnanimous in the same way as one is obliged to be just or honourable. But it is a queer fact, to be pondered on gravely, that lack of magnanimity very often leads to consequences precisely similar to those of a lack of justice or honour, and it is quite on the cards that in the relatively near future America, too, will find out how very real is that enigmatic law.

PS.—The following admonition is for America's ear alone. . . . Look here, America, I don't want to rub it in, but people in glasshouses really shouldn't throw stones. You've made—and make—an awful song about our being poltroons, refusing inexcusably to face up to war. Let me remind you, though friendly, of something. In September 1938, war was so tangibly near us that France began to mobilize. She did so with quite magnificent calm, order, and stoicism. In November 1938 America misunderstood a broadcast, and thought war was on its way to reach her. Forthwith she went and panicked, and made a first-class exhibition of herself. In view of the reaction of France to a concrete reality, and of that of America to a perfectly unconvincing "scare," I think that, in fairness, you should revise your opinion of our cowardice and of your own intrepidity. War isn't a joke, as you quickly found out when you imagined it was coming upon you.

ing with the greatest facility to the iniquities and vices of a number of ancient civilizations. During the last twenty centuries the Martyrdom of Man has been carried out, throughout the globe, chiefly by Europe. To one noble preoccupation alone did the European culture persistently adhere—but that was, in the final analysis, its essential characteristic, its peculiar and undying stamp, unbrokenly, incredibly continuing side by side with the injustices, the bestialities, and the perversions of our tortuous story. European culture conceived, and struggled for, the free development and the ultimate perfection of the spirit, and it held that spiritual values were the real values of man's existence, the highest consummation for which he was made, and that his destiny was unfulfilled until he achieved them.

"... To maintain, therefore, and to fortify this basic principle of Western civilization, a people must possess the same objective. The picture you have drawn of the American people hardly suggests that they are the champions of an order of thought which places in spiritual values the supreme meaning of human life. What you have shown is a society with many admirable or endearing traits, such as intelligence, imagination, courage, generosity, energy, efficiency, kindness, helpfulness, lack of petty envy—but also tumultuously chaotic and obstinately unfair, worshipping material success, insatiably greedy for tangible gains, guided by worldly standards, violent, restless, thoughtless, undisciplined and unscrupulous. On the top of all that, you indicate possibilities of a plunge into Marxist or Fascist barbarism. How can you reconcile your own description of America with your sincere persuasion that the Americans are bound to lead one day the Occidental civilization?"

The answer I gave Philip is the only explanation of which I am capable. It is not a scientific explanation. It is a belief.

"Because of the nature of the American soul," I said.

I cannot prove what I believe the American soul is. Far

from supplying me with proofs of what it is, America frequently did her very best to blind me to what it is. When I looked at the interests, ambitions and manners of Americans in New York or Chicago; at the living conditions of rural Americans in the Southern States and the West; at the conflicts between Capital and Labour; at the sort of mind which led twenty thousand Americans, with their wives and children, to pour festively into a small Kentucky town so as to witness the execution of two Blacks; at the activities of Tammany; at the organization of crime; at the treatment of minorities—the Indians disposed of by massacres and spoliations, the Negroes ostracized and terrified out of their constitutional political and civic rights; at the decadence, vulgarity and secularity of religion; at the semi-savage cults, at once tragical and farcical; at the number of old and young drunkards; at the plays and books about the morals of the great cities and the countryside; at the cheap, tawdry, thoroughly commercialized press; at the obdurate mental laziness, the make-believe, the superficiality of knowledge, the cocksure, boshy, pseudo-scientific popularizations; when I listened to the constant talk of money, business, getting-somewhere, and necessity for mundane success: I certainly did not discern in America the attributes that establish spiritual pre-eminence. So I must judge not by what I saw and heard, but by what I understood. I understood that there is a native composition, into which enter ancestral origins, traditions, habits, achievements and aspirations, that makes America invincibly democratic. She belongs for ever to that order, as a diamond belongs to the mineral kingdom and a fruit to the vegetable kingdom. She has had lapses from that order, and may have more, but they are or will be convulsions, not an enduring and incurable malady. Organically she is unalterable. She will be free, she will be individualistic, she will be equalitarian, she will be just, she will be humane, or she will cease to be America. If I am told that what I say is only the expression of a faith, I shall respond

that although faith cannot always produce evidence, it is in no wise inevitably divorced from reason, for reason is applicable to invisible as well as to visible things. In this matter of America's essence, my faith that it is indestructibly idealistic is supported by my reason—why, America was the ONLY nation which personified, *on the very day of her birth*, a political, social and spiritual Common Brotherhood of Man: never mind if it was merely on a large sheet of parchment—and I am satisfied with my own trust.

"There is no need to be bathetic," observed Philip. "After all, every opinion outside the realm of positive science is the statement of a faith, so you are quite entitled to your view. Only America herself can refute it, and as nothing can be conclusive till mankind peters out, it will be some considerable time before your mistake, if mistake it is, is revealed. And then you will be past bothering about an erroneous pronouncement. So that's all right.

"... But there is another point you should clear up. It is not sufficient to assert that America will continue to be democratic. Democracy is not static—particularly in America, where its realization limps so far behind its principle that often the realization drops out of sight altogether. It has a lot of ground to cover before it catches up. Have you thought of the shape American Democracy must take—in the near future if sanity and civilized feeling win the day, in the distant future if a turbulent Left or Right short-cut is first tried?"

Indeed I had. I had reflected on it ever since I became convinced that there was an American spirit and culture; that America had taken a wrong twist, and that under the wrong twist, which had dispossessed, impoverished and embittered her workers, corrupted, coarsened and blinded her rulers, her spirit and her culture were crying aloud for something to hope in, to believe in, and of which to be proud. During my months of travel in the country, I grew aware that they were beginning to know they were snared and

enslaved, and had been sold for a damned bad smelly pebbly mess of rotting pottage. (Well, you couldn't really expect, could you, that a spirit and a culture which had soared up, up and away into a Declaration of Independence would content themselves in perpetuity with more and more highways, cars, radios, plumbing, transportation of freight from one spot to another, as well as with more and more unmanageable public debts, mortgages, expropriated classes, slumps and citizens on relief?) So at length, after peering so hard and close into the future that now I've got a chronic headache, I discovered two roads along which American Democracy can evolve—and they are not wishful thinking, either. Their foundations have already been built.

The first road proceeds from the unionization of the proletariat, which, when completed, will bring Labour to power and eliminate that aspect of Capitalism represented by financial pyramiding and the concentration of actual power in the hands of the few for use against the many. Then will be constructed, I think, a social-economic system in which the individualism expressed by property and competition, inseparable from the American temperament, will subsist side by side with a sort of collectivism expressed by large-scale organization, gigantic team-work and huge concerted effort in the public interest—co-ordinated and co-operating enterprises for which the American is also constitutionally fitted by the old communal experiments in living. Such a system would entail the establishment of technocracy as the cardinal element in the American society—though technocracy would be at the service of the commonwealth; and commit America to industrialization—though industrialization would be entirely liberated from the despotic and arbitrary control of centralized banking, monopolies, and any oligarchy. It is a broad and relatively easy way to prosperity and unlimited technical progress. But I fear the dangers it involves: of putting such vast accumulations in the grasp of the State

that the latter may fall insensibly into tyranny; of the inevitable propagation of the mass-mind, to which Americans are so excessively prone; of the exaggeration of *expertise* and of the mechanization of thought. So in spite of its conformity to contemporary concepts of social development, its certainties of quick economic amelioration, and the likelihood of its triumph, it is not my cup of tea.

The second road is so completely in accordance with my ideas and tastes that I passionately hope America will choose it. It is a version of Jeffersonism, a Neo-Agrarian Republic, a nation with an overwhelming majority of small proprietors, their property consisting in land or tools—a return, in modern conditions, to the original American vision, the original American way, the original American lesson. That the vision was dimmed, the way lost, and the lesson neglected, does not mean that love of them and desire for them have vanished from the hearts of the people. No one who has listened to them can doubt that beneath their present bafflement or exasperation, the very great bulk of Americans retain a hunger, not for socialization, however flexible it may be, but for the realization of the old dream of genuine liberty, genuine self-government, genuine self-respect, and of the old promise to lay in the hands of every man his own means of production and all the surplus value he creates. Greed, foolishness, haste, and the glittering false arguments of credit-capitalism deflected the masses, but I believe that their deepest nostalgia is still of a life where none is rich and none is poor, where the extremes of luxury and leisure are abolished, and where industry and commerce exist in a simple form. The restoration of the people to the land and the land to the people would be neither an innovation nor a revolution, but the fulfilment of an organic wish and the working out of an atavistic philosophy.

I'd require a fat pamphlet to discuss how to rebuild the basis of America and make of her a Neo-Agrarian Republic—and I can't tack a fat pamphlet on to this book, it hasn't

got a convenient pouch like a kangaroo.<sup>4</sup> But the fundamental measures are obvious: abandonment of the horrible, depraving and bankrupting practice of commercial farming; decongestion and reduction of big towns; decentralization of industry and distribution, so as to supplant the present giant units by units small enough to allow each member of the group to share control and responsibility—exception made for the industries which for the common good must be on the grand scale, such as railways, the mails, the telegraph lines, electric power and other public utilities, which should be nationalized. Do you ask me whether I am adjuring America to turn into a peasant society savouring of the Middle Ages and forgoing the benefits of the machine? No; I'm not an idiot. I am adjuring her to do what her Fathers had planned: to go back to the land (or re-acquire it) and stay on the land and live primarily off the produce of the land, so that her families may be self-supporting, owning the implements they use and the soil they cultivate and the roof that shelters them; and so that a responsible agrarian population and the modest level-headed people of small agricultural market towns—not a rootless and shiftless proletariat and an unsound rapacious business bourgeoisie—may dominate the social, cultural, economic and political

<sup>4</sup> The most brilliant study I have read of an "agrarian" solution of America's economic and moral problems is *Land of the Free*, by Herbert Agar (Houghton Mifflin Co.). I fervently wish this exceptionally intelligent and intensely American author would write a primer which the people could understand, to explain to them what they are, why they went astray, and how their worth and significance can be revived. No one could do that better than he.

To a European, Mr. Agar's thesis is both congenial and familiar. The Scandinavian countries are an excellent example of the State he has in view, where widely distributed property in land is the basis of a proprietarian society. France before the War of 1914 was one of the richest and most economically solid nations in Europe, and she had thirty million people living on the land and only ten or so millions living in towns engaged in commerce and industry. The high standards attained in thought and art in both Scandinavia and France give the lie to the stupid argument that an agrarian civilization is incapable of great intellectuality. Also, when the Depression swept Europe, the percentage of the unemployed in these agrarian countries was enormously lower than in the over-industrialized countries, such as Great Britain, which had practised a hideous economy depopulating the English land and proletarianizing the English worker. The American economic system, that was an even more detestable and pernicious copy of England's industrial-finance-credit capitalist régime, came, as we all can see, a tragical cropper.

life of the State, give it morality and tone and honourable objectives. There is no necessity to become primitive. But there is a necessity—a crucial necessity—to take up again a mode of existence that is instinctive to America, and that supplied her once with a purpose, a faith and a meaning. The Tennessee Valley experiment, which is the most authentically glorious feat of modern America, understood that, and is doing it in the region it is slowly transforming. Put in harmony, by democratic processes in a democratic country, with their natural spirit and their spontaneous culture, the American people cannot but attain to that steadfastness, the *sine qua non* of maturity, without which neither their physical nor their political advantages, immense as they are, can ensure to them world authority. Nothing less than world authority is now needed to keep our species civilized, and only America can wield it. I pray that she will find herself rapidly and comprehensively enough to wield it *in time*.

"Missis Oh," said Philip solemnly. "The Lord God, and Nature, and her own sons, have now and then exerted themselves in favour of America—yes. But her immeasurable and incomparable privilege lies in another direction. YOU happened to America. You Know It All, and you've Told her It All. Her path is now illuminated and her salvation secured. Henceforth, to be Good and Great and Happy, she has just one, little, simple, easy thing to do: Follow It All."

That silly Philip thought he was being very funny. Well, he wasn't. Because I love her and hope in her, to follow it all is precisely my valediction to America.

Lou Pidou,  
GRASSE.

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